

10-STORY ALL DIFFERENT! DETECTIVE

MAGAZINE



JULY

10¢



THE CORPSE
AT THE CARNIVAL

By DWIGHT V. BABCOCK

HOMICIDE DEMON

By H. F. SORENSEN

THOUSANDS MARVEL TO SEE THEIR SKINNY BODIES FILL OUT...

As Wonderful IRONIZED YEAST Tablets Add 10 to 25 Pounds in a Few Weeks

SCIENTISTS have discovered that thousands of people are thin and rundown only because they don't get enough Vitamin B and iron from their daily food. Without these vital substances you may lack appetite and not get the most body-building good out of what you eat.

Once these substances are supplied—and you get them now in these amazing little Ironized Yeast tablets—the improvement that comes in a short time is often astonishing. Thousands report wonderful new pep, gains of 10 to 25 pounds in a few weeks—complexions naturally clear—a new natural attractiveness that wins friends everywhere.

Food chemists have found that one of the richest sources of marvelous health-building Vitamin B is the special rich yeast used in making English ale. Now by a costly process, this rich imported ale yeast is combined with Vitamin B concentrate from yeast and with 3 kinds of strength-building iron.

The result is these new, easy-to-take Ironized Yeast tablets, which thousands of formerly skinny people who needed their vital substances hail as one of the greatest weight-building, health-building discoveries of all time.

Make this money-back test

Get Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today. If with the first package you don't eat better and FEEL better, with much more strength and pep—if you're not convinced that Ironized Yeast will give you the normally attractive flesh, new energy and life you have longed for, the price of this first package promptly refunded.

Only be sure you get genuine Ironized Yeast, and not some cheap, inferior substitute which does not give the same results. Look for "IY" stamped on each tablet.

Special offer!

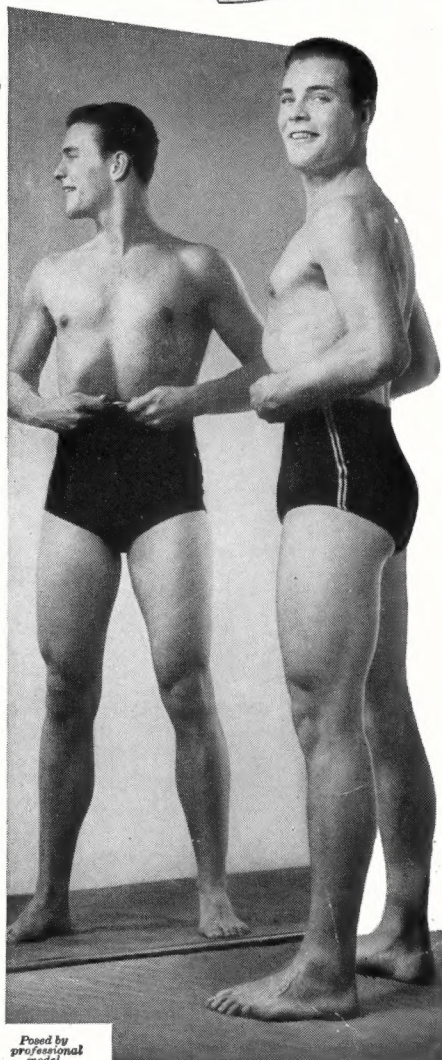
To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this special offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out the seal on the box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with the first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 937, Atlanta, Ga.



IMPORTANT

**Beware of substitutes.
Be sure you get genuine
IRONIZED YEAST.**

**Look for the letters "IY"
on each tablet.**



*Posed by
professional
models*

HAIR WANTED

Bring Them Back Alive!

Hair hunters have grown in leaps and bounds! The reason is simple. There are 14 local causes of baldness, any one of which might be attacking your hair growing area. In order to bring them back alive . . . providing it isn't too late, it is necessary to get at the cause of your trouble . . . remove the trouble and then nature can work without interference. VITEX'S Triple-Action Conditioner will help to stop scalp itch, excessive dandruff and help promote normal hair growth. VITEX'S CONDITIONER for the Hair and Scalp is the result of over 30 years' experience, study and application.



IT is a Concentrate, consisting of carefully selected and entirely harmless ingredients, exactly prepared and compounded to CREATE and maintain a healthy Scalp condition that will be conducive to the natural continued growth of Hair. It is the same product used with amazing success in our Fifth Avenue Salon . . . it must be good!

Read What Users Say!

A BARBER WRITES

One of my customers bought a bottle to try on his hair. Already I have given him 3 treatments. We have no proof it will make hair grow but in 30 yrs. of barbering it is the first time I'm convinced that your conditioner will stop hair from falling.

S. B. A., Fresno, Calif.

FRIEND RECOMMENDS

My friend uses your conditioner for his hair and it seems to help him, so he told me that he thinks it will help me also. I would deeply appreciate your opinion and I'm enclosing \$3 for a large 16 oz. bottle.

B. E. R., Westfield, Mass.

DECIDED IMPROVEMENT

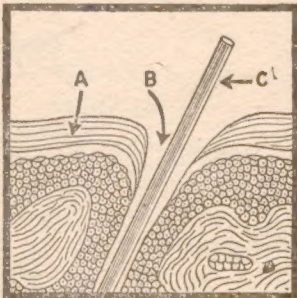
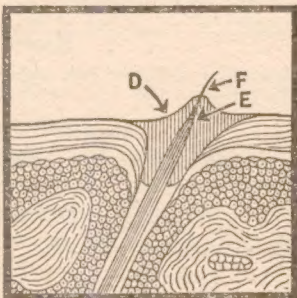
Enclosed find check in amount of \$3, for which send the 16 oz. size. In March issue of "Click" I noticed various pictures pertaining to VITEX'S Conditioner and decided I would try same. I sent for \$1 size, and, much to my amazement, after using it was quite satisfied. There is a decided improvement in my hair and others have noticed it. Words can't express my thanks for your wonderful discovery.

W. G., Chicago, Ill.

FIRST BOTTLE SHOWS IMPROVEMENT

I have received my trial bottle and am using it according to instructions. About ten days ago I started massaging my scalp morning and evening. It seems to me that my hair started looking much better and the short thinning hair seemed to be growing some.

P. L., Vandalia, Ill.



Save the Roots and Save Hair

The highly magnified cross section (see top cut at left) shows that either clogged up follicles keep choking it back or else poor circulation prevents hair from growing through with the necessary degree for hair health. When hair is strong and healthy a cross section reveals (see bottom cut) a clean, loose and well lubricated scalp. Use VITEX'S CONDITIONER.

Use At Once to Help Recondition Your Scalp

Men and women who are anxious to stop excessive hair loss and correct local scalp disorders, should order VITEX'S TRIPLE-ACTION CONDITIONER at once. Click Magazine thought enough of the VITEX METHOD to give it a two page pictorial write-up in their March 1939 issue. Prove to yourself that VITEX'S CONDITIONER can help you. A special 8 treatment size costs only \$1.00. Not sold in stores. Only obtainable direct from us.

VITEX'S Conditioner Helps Promote 3 Important Hair Benefits

1. Stimulates Growth Areas: After applying Conditioner you will note a pleasant tingling or "drawing" sensation. Evidence of how effectively your scalp is being stimulated in the areas where blood must nourish the hair roots.
2. Helps dispel dandruff, stops itching. Effective in dissolving accumulated waste matter that strangles the hair and causes irritation by clogging up the follicle "funnels." Thus the Conditioner quickly helps create correct conditions for healthful and natural growth.
3. Purifies as it cleanses. After you have allowed the CONDITIONER to "work" as directed, it saponifies easily with water and rinses completely clean, leaving the scalp healthfully clear and the hair naturally brilliant.



Money Back Guarantee

Here's our unconditional offer. We want you to be convinced that VITEX'S TRIPLE-ACTION HAIR AND SCALP CONDITIONER is a product of merit . . . we want you to use it without reserving a single penny. You must be satisfied with the results or your money will be refunded in full. Merely sign your name and address to the coupon and send it to us with \$1 bill. Your VITEX Hair Institute Conditioner will be sent by return mail in plain wrapper postpaid (C.O.D. orders in United States only) \$1.00 plus postage.

Send Coupon NOW!

FREE SCALP EXAMINATION

If you live in New York or expect to visit the World's Fair, you are invited to call at our Fifth Avenue Salon. One of our experts will gladly give you a free scalp examination.

VITEX HAIR INSTITUTE, Dept. 207 - 521 5th Ave., N.Y.

I accept your special offer. Enclosed find \$1.00. Send me the 8 treatment size of VITEX'S HAIR AND SCALP TRIPLE-ACTION CONDITIONER postpaid in plain wrapper. If not satisfied with results, I will return unused portion within ten days for full refund. () Send C.O.D. plus postage, same guarantee.)

SPECIAL OFFER For economy, order the 16 oz. size of VITEX'S HAIR CONDITIONER (four times the quantity) and we will include a 1 oz. dollar jar of VITEX'S CORRECTIVE POMADE. You save \$2 and the Pomade speeds up results. Mark X here ☐ if this offer is desired. Special offer price \$3.00.

Name

Address

NOTE—Canadian and foreign orders must be accompanied by cash.

10-STORY DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

ALL STAR
ALL DIFFERENT

Vol. II

JULY, 1939

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Cover by Norman Saunders

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HE THOUGHT HE WAS LICKED—THEN A TIP GOT BILL A GOOD JOB!

MY RAISE DIDN'T COME THROUGH MARY—I MIGHT AS WELL GIVE UP. IT ALL LOOKS SO HOPELESS.

IT ISN'T HOPELESS EITHER BILL. WHY DON'T YOU TRY A NEW FIELD LIKE RADIO?



TOM GREEN WENT INTO RADIO AND HE'S MAKING GOOD MONEY, TOO. I'LL SEE HIM RIGHT AWAY.



BILL, JUST MAILING THAT COUPON GAVE ME A QUICK START TO SUCCESS IN RADIO. MAIL THIS ONE TONIGHT



TOM'S RIGHT—AN UNTRAINED MAN HASN'T A CHANCE, I'M GOING TO TRAIN FOR RADIO TOO. IT'S TODAY'S FIELD OF GOOD PAY OPPORTUNITIES



TRAINING FOR RADIO IS EASY AND I'M GETTING ALONG FAST—

SOON I CAN GET A JOB SERVICING SETS— OR INSTALLING LOUD SPEAKER SYSTEMS OR IN A BROADCASTING STATION

THERE'S NO END TO THE GOOD JOBS FOR THE TRAINED RADIO MAN



YOU SURE KNOW RADIO—MY SET NEVER SOUNDED BETTER

THAT'S \$15 I'VE MADE THIS WEEK IN SPARE TIME

THANKS!



I HAVE A GOOD FULL TIME RADIO JOB NOW—AND A BRIGHT FUTURE AHEAD IN RADIO

OH BILL, IT'S WONDERFUL YOU'VE GONE AHEAD SO FAST IN RADIO.



HERE'S PROOF THAT MY TRAINING PAYS



Broadcast Operator After Twenty Lessons

\$10 to \$25 a Week In Spare Time



"When I had completed the first twenty lessons I had obtained my license as Radio Broadcast Operator and immediately joined the staff of WMPC, where I am now chief operator."—
HOLLIS F. HAYES, 85 Madison St., Lapeer, Mich.

"I am making from \$10 to \$25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my success to N. R. I.—WM. F. RUPP, 203 W. Front St., West Conshohocken, Pa.



\$3,500 a Year in Own Business

"After completing the N. R. I. Course I became Radio Editor of the Buffalo Courier. Later I started a Radio Service business of my own, and have averaged over \$3,500 a year."—T. J. TELIAK, 657 Broadway, Buffalo, N. Y.



I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME In Your Spare Time For A GOOD RADIO JOB

Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Radio broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators, station managers and pay well for trained men. Fixing Radio sets in spare time pays many \$200 to \$500 a year—full time jobs with Radio jobbers, manufacturers and dealers as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts open full or part time Radio sales and repair businesses. Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, in good-pay jobs with opportunities for advancement. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, loudspeaker systems are newer fields offering good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises to open many good jobs soon. Men I trained have good jobs in these branches of Radio. Read how they got their jobs. Mail coupon.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra In Spare Time While Learning

The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; show you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and directions that made good spare time money—\$200 to \$500—for hundreds, while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make good money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time jobs after graduation.

Find Out What Radio Offers You

Act Today. Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing and earning. Find out what Radio offers YOU! MAIL COUPON in an envelope, or paste on a postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 9GAS National Radio Institute, Washington, D. C.

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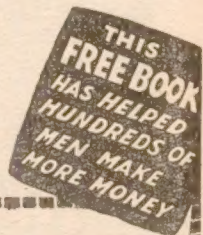
Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME.....AGE.....
ADDRESS.....
CITY.....STATE.....



J. E. SMITH, President National Radio Institute Established 25 years

He has directed the training of more men for Radio than anyone else.



Please mention ACB FICTION GROUP when answering advertisements

FREE TUBE WITH ORDER FOR 2 TIRES

GOODYEAR-GOODRICH-FIRESTONE-U.S. ALL OTHER BRANDS

GET MORE FOR YOUR MONEY

Save 34% under from us under a positive LEGAL AGREEMENT to replace any tires that do not give 12 mos. service at 34 purchase price. We can do this because STANDARD BRAND tires when reconditioned with Post's expert workmanship, finest material and new methods do the work as proven by thousands of satisfied users, all over the U. S. A. Convince yourself. Order Now. 12 mos. RECD WARRANTY with Each Tire

BALLOON TIRES			CORD TIRES		
Size	Rim	Tires Tubes	Size	Tires Tubes	
28x4.40	-21	\$2.15 \$1.08	30x3.5	\$2.35	.95
28x4.50	-20	2.25 1.08	31x4	2.95	1.25
30x4.50	-21	2.40 1.15	32x4	2.95	1.25
28x4.75	-19	2.45 1.25	33x4	2.95	1.25
28x4.75	-20	2.50 1.25	34x4	3.25	1.35
28x5.00	-19	2.85 1.25	32x4 1/2	3.35	1.40
30x5.00	-20	2.85 1.25	33x4 1/2	3.45	1.45
5.25-17		2.90 1.35	34x4 1/2	3.45	1.45
28x5.25	-19	2.90 1.35	30x5	3.65	1.65
28x5.25	-20	2.95 1.35	30x5 1/2	3.65	1.65
30x5.25	-20	3.45 1.35	32x5 1/2	3.75	1.75
31x5.25	-21	3.25 1.35	35x5 1/2	3.95	1.75
5.50-17		3.35 1.40			
28x5.50	-18	3.35 1.40			
28x5.50	-19	3.35 1.45			
5.00-16		3.75 1.45			
5.00-17		4.00 1.40			
30x5.00	-19	3.40 1.40			
31x5.00	-19	3.40 1.45			
32x5.00	-20	3.45 1.45			
33x5.00	-20	3.65 1.55			
33x5.00	-21	3.65 1.55			
32x5.00	-20	3.75 1.75			
32x5.00	-20	3.75 1.75			

H. D. TRUCKS

Size	Tires Tubes	
30x5	\$4.25	\$1.95
32x5	7.95	2.05
32x6	10.95	2.95
32x6 1/2	10.95	4.65

H. D. TRUCK BALLOONS

Size	Tires Tubes	
6.00-20	\$3.75	\$1.05
6.50-20	4.45	1.05
7.00-20	5.95	2.05
7.50-20	6.95	3.75

TUBES GUARANTEED BRAND NEW

Send \$1.00 Deposit on each tire ordered (\$3.00 Deposit on each Truck Tire) Balance C. O. D. If you send Cash in full deduct 5%. If brand ordered is out of stock we ship equal value.

POST TIRE & RUBBER CO., Dept. 1117
4621-23 Cottage Grove Ave., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

WORK FOR THE GOVERNMENT

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS **CITY CARRIERS**

COUPON

Franklin Institute, Dept. 1233, Rochester, N. Y.

Sirs: Rush without charge (1) 32-page book with list of U. S. Government Jobs. (2) Tell me how to qualify for one.

Name _____
Address _____

Get ready immediately. Mail Coupon Today — SURE

FORTUNE TELLING CARDS

The world-famous fortune teller Madame Le Normand's own secret system and deck of cards in colors. Anyone knowing the key may read them at a glance.

"TELL FORTUNES" at parties, bazaars, or in your home for your own amusement. Send 50 cents in coin, stamps or M. O.

OCCULT BOX 50 DEPT. R-7 WHITESTONE, N. Y.

WANTED

ORIGINAL POEMS, SONGS for Publication and Radio and for submission to motion picture, record and transcription markets.

Westmore Music Corporation, Dept. IF, Portland, Ore.

WILL YOU WEAR THIS SUIT and Make up to \$12 in a Day!

Let me send you a fine all-wool union tailored suit FREE OF ONE PENNY COST. Just follow my easy plan and show the suit to your friends. Make up to \$12 in a day easily. No experience—no house-to-house canvassing necessary.

Send for Samples—FREE OF COST. Write today for FREE details. ACTUAL SAMPLES and "sure-fire" money-making plans. Send no money. H. J. Goltin, PROGRESS TAILORING CO., Dept. U-192, 500 South Throop Street, Chicago, Illinois.

HOW DOES A CORPSE FEEL?

You may have done everything.
You may have seen everything.
But one thing you haven't done is be a corpse.

Let Russell Bender show you how in a

GRIPPING "SHAG AND BONES" NOVELET

ME—CORPSE!

—Also Two Other Novelets—

The LEAGUE of PERJURERS

By R. B. S. DAVIS

Dynamic Novelet of a man who sold his body and soul to a crime combine.

HELL'S HANDICAP

By ARTHUR WATTS BROWN

Death rode Melody Boy in the fatal Fortuity Handicap. For the kid jockey astride the favorite was the lead-off man on a crimson-splashed course.

—And Seven Short Stories, including—

CRIMSON COINS

By HAROLD F. SORENSEN

When a coin collector became a merchant of doom, Detective Yates rang up a quick sale on the Grim Reaper's register. For the priceless coins turned into blood money—with a hot-seat settlement.



JULY Out May 31

Please mention ACE FICTION GROUP when answering advertisements

Train my QUICK EASY WAY FOR ELECTRICITY

**PAY TUITION AFTER GRADUATION
IN EASY MONTHLY PAYMENTS**

I've got a quicker, easier way to train you in the opportunity field of Electricity. I'll take you here in my shops for a 12 weeks' training on real actual Electrical machinery and equipment which will prepare you for your start to a better job and a real future. Of course, all the training in the world couldn't help you if it was out of your reach. Well, because I know this I've made it possible for you to get this training even if you haven't a lot of money. Send the Coupon today and I'll not only tell you about my training but I'll tell you how you can get it first and pay for it later. Get training first—then start paying for it in easy monthly payments starting 60 days after your regular 12 weeks' training period is over.



Look at this picture and you will understand how my students learn quickly by my "Learn By Doing" method of training on actual equipment.

Learn By Doing In 12 Weeks In the Chicago Coyne Shops

First you are TOLD how to do a thing—then you are SHOWN how to do it—THEN YOU DO THE WORK YOURSELF. Can you imagine a more simple way to learn? This method of training gets away from the old idea of dry text books.

You Don't Need Previous Experience or a Lot of Education

Because of my simple "easy-to-understand" method and my practical shop training you don't have to have previous experience or advanced education. My training has been prepared to help the fellow who wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth. It's been designed to help the fellow who didn't have a lot of chances, or a rich father.

Part Time Work—Employment Assistance After Graduation

If you need part time work to help pay expenses while training, my employment man gives you this assistance—then after graduation you get lifetime employment service.



Diesel, Electric Refrigeration, Air Conditioning Training

Because I want you to get the most out of your training you get valuable training in these three subjects. Look at the picture at the left—also the one at the top of the page. This will give you an idea of how my students are trained by my famous "Learn by Doing" method.

Electricity is the Opportunity Field

A lot of fellows go through life never getting anywhere because they can't make up their minds what they want to follow. The fellow that knows what he wants and goes ahead is the fellow who goes places. Make up your mind today to get into Electricity, the live opportunity field.

Get My Story

I've got a mighty interesting story to tell you about my school. It's a story that will interest any fellow who wants to get ahead. I've told my story in a big book which I want to send you. All you have to do to get it is—Fill in the Coupon today and mail it to me and you'll get the story and all the facts.

H. C. Lewis

AN EXTRA
4 WEEKS
COURSE IN
RADIO
INCLUDED

Then let me show you how to get started through my quicker, easier training and the unusual chance I'm giving you to get this training.

Mr. H. C. Lewis, President,
COYNE ELECTRICAL SCHOOL,
500 S. Paulina St., Dept. B9-61,
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Send me that book that tells the story of your training and your offer to help me get this training.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

COYNE H. C. LEWIS, Pres. Founded 1899
ELECTRICAL SCHOOL
500 So. Paulina St. Dept. B9-61 Chicago

Mr. Mattingly & Mr. Moore find folks appreciate good whiskey!

"Oh, Mr. Mattingly,
Oh, Mr. Mattingly,
I was stopped upon the highway
by a stranger



"Who said: 'Sir, my name is legion—
One of many in this region
Who will stick to M & M,
and never change, sir!'"



"Yes, Mr. Moore,
Yes, Mr. Moore,
There are thousands
who agree with him, you know ...



"They like the way we slow-distill ...
(We always have, and always will!)
And they like its mellow flavor ...
and its price so really low!"



THE fame and popularity of
Mattingly & Moore are due to
its grand, old-fashioned flavor!

You see, M & M is ALL whiskey
... every drop *slow-distilled*.
More, M & M is a *blend of straight
whiskies* ... the kind of whiskey
we think is best of all.

Ask for M & M, *today*... at your
favorite bar or package store.
Your first taste will show you
why M & M has been famous
down in Kentucky for more than
60 years ... why it is even *more
famous today!* And remember ...
the price is *amazingly low!*

Mattingly & Moore

Long on Quality—Short on Price!

*A blend of straight whiskies—90 proof. Every drop is whiskey:
Frankfort Distilleries, Incorporated, Louisville & Baltimore.*



The Corpse at the Carnival

By Dwight V. Babcock

Author of "The Jitterbug Murder," etc.



CHAPTER I

DEATH ON THE DRAGON SLIDE

Suddenly the festive beach resort became frozen with foreboding. For Death rode the Dragon Slide that night. And Investigator Millard discovered that the girl he loved was coasting on the slippery track of Satan's juggernaut.

CHRIS MILLARD leaned against the bar in a doorless beer hall on Ocean Front and looked out at the passersby. The throngs moving along the boardwalk were like the shifting waters of a churning river, flowing toward the entrance to the amusement pier, mov-

ing ceaselessly under the lighted arch.

It was a balmy summer evening and the waterfront Romeos were out in force, squiring small girls, tall girls, girls with big hips and girls without any at all. Rambling merry-makers whose incessant babble was like the steady sound of surf against the music and noise from the amusement pier.

Inside the bar a small radio hummed to life, snapped on by the bartender, and a sharply staccato voice burst from the loudspeaker, rattling out an eight p. m. news broadcast from a small local station. Millard didn't change his position, but listened with one ear. The voice was saying:

"... Apparently vanished into thin air, escaping without leaving any trace behind. However, he is believed to have headed back toward this vicinity and may have reached the city by now. The police department is running down several anonymous tips that have been received naming Fitz' whereabouts, but up to a late hour these had led to nothing.

"As listeners to our earlier broadcasts know, Eddie Fitz escaped while en route to San Quentin on the train, slugging one of his guards and jumping through a window somewhere this side of Santa Barbara this afternoon.

"Fitz was recently convicted when tried for conducting a string of book-making and gambling establishments throughout the city. His indictment was one of the first steps taken to rid the city of vice and graft under the new regime of Mayor Peters, who went into office on the recall election of last winter.

"Fitz was reputedly the head of a syndicate of gamblers that controlled the former city administration, and his conviction was a feather in Mayor Peters' cap, following as it did the shakeup and purge in the police department. . . ."

The voice switched to another subject, but was cut off by the bartender's

fingers on the dial. He pushed a cloth up the mahogany toward Millard, said conversationally:

"That was a screwy thing for Fitz to do. I always figured the guy had brains."

"He's no dummy," Millard agreed, turning halfway from the open doorway and putting one hand possessively about the almost empty stein of flat beer before him. "Maybe he had some unfinished business to attend to before going away to college."

THE bartender was brawny and white-haired, with tough scarred lips. He nodded knowingly. "Yeah. Well, he hadn't better come around here. The beach is lousy with cops on the lookout for him." He reached to get a clipped sheaf of papers from the back bar, put it down before Millard. "You want to sign our petition?"

Millard glanced obliquely down at the papers, sighed. "Another one of those things, huh? No, I don't want to sign it."

"Why not?" the bartender demanded in truculent surprise.

"Because"—Millard was gazing out through the doorway again—"that's a petition asking for the secession of the beach towns from the city. The beaches are part of the metropolitan district now, under the city administration. Since Peters went into office, the heat's been on—and he's run the gambling syndicate to cover down here at the beaches. It's making its last stand now.

"It—or Bonelli, who stepped up to the number one spot since Eddie Fitz' trial—is behind these petitions. If they can get enough names to divorce the beaches from the city, the syndicate will take the lid off and run wide open down here—bookie joints, bingo parlors, gambling ships three miles out, and what not."

"So what's the matter with that?" the bartender growled. "It'd be good for business. You don't look like one of these here now lousy blue-nose reformers."

Millard glanced at his image in the big mirror behind the stacked rows of bottles, smiled crookedly. He was a lean figure of a man with smooth black hair under a tilted-back gray snapbrim. He had high cheekbones, a wide good-humored mouth. Fingering the stubble on his long jaw, he decided he needed a shave. He shook his head.

"I'm not. Personally, I like a wide-open town. It'd be all right, maybe, if Eddie Fitz were still running things—but not with Bonelli in charge. He's a fat crooked schemer; he couldn't play it clean and straight and be satisfied with his percentage that way.

"A district under his domination would only breed graft and vice and corruption. It would be a festering spot for crime. And I admire this new mayor. He's sincere and he's a fighter, and he's really cleaning up. If it comes to a choice between Peters and a guy like Bonelli—I'll take Peters."

The bartender sneered audibly, an explosive snorting sound. He looked at Millard's almost empty glass, snarled disgustedly:

"You want another beer?"

Grinning, Millard shook his head. "No. That slop you're serving now is putrid. You used to have Sunshine Beer on draught. What'd you take it out for?"

"We got too many complaints on it." The bartender's eyes were bleak and unfriendly. "If you don't like what we got—scram! This ain't no hangout for—"

But Millard had already gone, stepping out and quickly sifting through the passersby. From his place in the doorway he had been watching the front of a building across the boardwalk. He had seen Lefty Reid step out of the door of that building, look the crowd over carefully, then turn back to the door and nod. Bert Bonelli slipped out after that, holding his face low and wearing dark glasses, a straw topper riding his bullet head instead of the usual derby.

The dark glasses were a disguise, but it was impossible to mistake that squat form. Bonelli was a stocky, thick-set man, with loud, arrogant mannerisms. Right now, however, he was trying to be as unimposing and inconspicuous as possible.

Only something very important would bring him out at a time like this, with Eddie Fitz on the loose. He melted into the moving throng, and his stooge—Lefty Reid—slid along behind him like a furtive shadow.

Millard followed, filtering through the crowd and using it as a screen. Trailed at a distance by Reid, Bonelli turned in under the arched entry to the amusement pier, kept walking past the first roller coaster and the big HELL 'N' BACK sign.

Long necklaces of colored bulbs lined the lighted concessions. Guns popped in the shooting galleries, a merry-go-round made harsh music, and the strident voices of hawkers and barkers knifed through it all. Lots of noise and cheap glitter and a spirit of what-the-hell.

A BUNCH of high-school kids came yelling down the pier, and a fat mamma ahead of Millard jumped to get out of the way and dug him in the belly with an elbow, knocking the wind out of him. When he'd set the fat lady back on her feet and got straightened around himself, the high-school kids were on down the pier piling into the roller coaster, and Bonelli and Reid had been swallowed by the mob.

Millard swore, shoving his hat to the back of his head and glancing at the tower of the Dragon Slide which was up the line a little way. He looked down and around and was moving ahead again when he saw *her*. He stopped stock still.

She was coming along the pier at the edge of the crowd and she was alone, a slim straight little figure walking purposefully. Most of her soft brown hair was tucked up under a ridiculous little turban-like hat; and

a scarf that was part of the hat was fixed so that it hung across the lower part of her face, like a mask. You couldn't see anything but her large, long-lashed eyes, flashing nervously from side to side as she moved forward along the pier.

But Millard would have known that trim little figure anywhere, that quick, sure way of swinging her slim legs as she walked. He took an involuntary step to meet her and her glance crossed his, jerked back. Her eyes widened with an expression akin to despair and her stride faltered, slowed.

He cut through the crowd to her side. "May! What are you doing here?"

Her eyes flicked about fearfully through the passersby and she spoke without looking at him, her voice low and vibrant with urgency. "Please—don't stop me here, Chris!"

Concern was like a shadow on his face. He took her arm, moved slowly toward a deserted entryway. "You didn't come out here to meet Eddie? He isn't—"

"No." Agitated breathing moved her breasts, stirred the linen of her suit. A bitterness was in her tone. "I didn't come out to meet Eddie. How *could* I see him, with detectives hanging around my apartment like flies around a sugar bowl? Oh, Chris—why did he do it? Why did he break free?"

"I don't know," he said tightly. "But you must have been followed here."

"No." She flashed another nervous look back through the milling throngs. "I think I shook them off."

He stopped her. "Shook who off? And why are you here, May?"

"I had to come out to—" She looked up at him, and her eyes had hardened with sudden quick suspicion. "Why do you want to know?"

"I'm only thinking of you," he told her earnestly. "I don't know what you're up to, but I don't want you to get in trouble. And I want you to know I'm sorry about Eddie, May.

I've wanted to tell you that. He was a good guy in his way, but in the wrong business. He shouldn't have made that break; he should have taken his medicine and started over again clean. It wasn't a tough rap—only a few years."

She gave a short brittle laugh that ended in a half sob. "You—you wouldn't understand. You're like all the rest of them! You're a private detective. You're after him, too!"

Hysteria was behind her words, but the bitterness and contempt in them stung him like a whiplash. Before he could answer, she had spun away from him, darted into the entryway they had approached and was gone.

He cried, "May—!" and took one step after her, looked up and stopped short with an oath as he saw the sign: Women's Rest Room. As he swung away, his cheeks were burning as if she had struck him.

She'd told him off once before, sent him away. That was long before her brother's trial. But he still couldn't help being that way about her; there just wasn't anyone else for him. Being Eddie Fitz' sister made no difference as far as he was concerned—but it seemed to to her.

HE waited outside the rest room for ten minutes, hoping she'd come out, before abruptly remembering that there was a rear exit. Then he realized he was wasting his time and started plowing through the crowd looking for her or Lefty Reid and Bert Bonelli.

The fact that she was out here on the pier the same time as Bonelli bothered him. Bonelli had been on the make for her once, had been warned off by her brother, but now that Eddie Fitz had been convicted, though temporarily free, Bonelli might be making another play.

The very thought of Bonelli's greasy paws touching May made Millard's blood boil and a sort of red mist swim across his vision. He *had*

to find them, and he spotted Lefty Reid finally, standing at one corner of the Dragon Slide tower.

Easing up to him, Millard said: "Hello, Weasel. Where's the Big Shot?"

Reid had a weasel-face, but he didn't like to be reminded of it. He turned quickly, a look of deadly hate in his flat button eyes, holding a long nail file like a dagger in his left fist.

"How would I know?" he snarled. "You following me?"

"Oh, no," Millard said, letting go of a harsh chuckle. "I'm just curious as to how soon the rats will start deserting the sinking ship."

Reid was a thin, white-skinned man, and he'd been filing a thumb-nail with the long wicked-looking nail file. He went back to work with it, but kept his gaze on Millard.

"Whadda you mean by that crack?"

"You know what I mean." Millard got out a cigarette, stuck it between his lips. "Eddie Fitz broke loose for only one reason—to come back and get Bonelli. Bonelli sold him out, and Fitz knows it by now. Your boss wanted to step up to the top and play big shot, so he threw Fitz to the wolves. I'd hate to be in Bonelli's shoes right now. Where is he?"

"You want him. Find him." Reid slithered away, like a snake dropping off a dead log.

Lighting a cigarette, Millard stayed where he was but followed the other man with his eyes until his moving figure was lost in the shifting mob. Reid had been waiting here for a reason and Bonelli shouldn't be very far away. He sent his gaze questing around.

Dummy airplanes whirled round and round in the air at the concession farther down. And next to that was the boat chute. In a booth across the midway a little counter radio was talking about Eddie Fitz again. Millard could just catch the name above the noise and hubbub of the crowd.

The scream wasn't part of the

broadcast. It knifed out close enough to raise the hair on the back of his neck. Other women began to squeal. Millard whirled and saw the crowd pressing back away from the huge dragon mouth at the foot of the spiral slide. He fought forward to where he could see, and halted abruptly.

Bert Bonelli was sprawled out on his back just inside the fangs of the dragon, the way he'd shot out of the chute. Blood was spilling out of his wet mouth and his skull was caved in. The back of his bullet head was a jelly-like mass of hair and blood and brains.

CHAPTER II

SISTER OF DOOM



ONE glance was enough to tell Millard that Bonelli would give no more trouble to anyone. The police would be up to the pier in a few minutes. Panic clutched at Millard, his mind churning with thoughts of May and Eddie Fitz. He swiftly circled the jam about the dragon mouth, knifed his way through to the elevator that took amusement seekers to the top of the Dragon Slide.

It was in the center, a closed shaft with the entrance to one side, behind the ticket office and out of sight from the crowd. The door stood open and the car itself was empty, the operator probably out in front gaping at the corpse.

Millard slid the screen shut, jammed the lever over to the "up" position. The car rose on well-oiled cables, and he got the flat .32 automatic from the clip under his arm and out into his hand.

At the top he slid back the door. It opened on a small circular areaway, like an observation tower, and the entrance to the slide was directly ahead of him. He stepped out, sending a quick glance from right to left, the

gun low at his side. No one was in sight up here, and the relief that smote him left him weak and shaky.

The slide began in a few narrow curves that widened more and more as it corkscrewed around the tower to the bottom, enclosed in the tail and body of the dragon coiled about the structure. He looked into the opening, studied it as far as he could see into it.

There was blood on the smooth-worn wood, fresh blood smeared in a downward stain. His nerves jerked at a soft creak of noise behind him, and he whirled about.

May Fitz was standing there, had stepped from a crevice behind the elevator shaft, was staring at him and the gun in his hand. The scarf no longer covered her face, which was taut and white with strain. She spoke in a swift, tight whisper.

"Chris! What are you doing here? What's the matter?"

"What are *you* doing here?" he bit out harshly, sickening despair eating at his heart. This is what he had feared—the finding of her here. He jerked his chin at the elevator. "Come on. You've got to get out of this."

"But—what is it!" Her russet eyes were dilated with dread. "What—"

"You know what. Bert Bonelli was just knocked off up here and dumped down that slide. I don't know if you did it and I don't care. But we've got to get out of here."

Down at the end of the pier an approaching siren was cutting through all other sound. It galvanized him into action. He thrust her into the car as she protested shakily:

"But I didn't do it, Chris. I didn't do it!"

"Okay. But you were up here for some reason, and if you're found, the cops can make a swell case against you. I'll do my best to keep you out of this. I'll get you clear if I can."

He dropped the car so fast his own heart choked him for a moment. May Fitz didn't speak, but stood braced

against the car wall, shivering. Not looking at her, he said: "Did you—was Eddie here?"

"No!" she cried softly. "No!"

He brought the car to a jolting stop, ordered bluntly: "If there's no one waiting outside here when I open this door, you beat it out the back way. Go back to that rest room and stay there till things quiet down."

"Thanks, Chris." She touched his arm, and her eyes wavered up to his for a moment. "It wasn't Eddie. I don't know who it was, so help me!"

She could be lying. She would lie to protect her brother. But he wasn't going to let any cop put the arm on her if he could help it.

"Okay, kid," he muttered. "Let's go."

He slid back the door, and the crowd was still jammed out in front; no one was waiting here in the cubicle behind the box office. The guy who ran the elevator was still with the rest of the mob. Siren sound was drowning out the crowd noise. Millard pushed May toward the back. There was a door opening out under the roller coaster frame, and he saw her through it, then turned back.

HE was poking around inside the elevator when the prowling car cops swarmed in and took charge. A big bluecoat with his service gun out barged in on Millard, his eyes thinned suspiciously. Millard showed his identification, his private dick shield, and the cop clipped:

"Oh! What're you doing here?"

"I just happened to be around when Bonelli came out of the chute."

"Been up above?"

"No."

"Okay. Get out of the way. I'm going up. The killer may still be there."

The cop was hard and ambitious. This was a chance for a promotion and he knew it. Millard stepped out of the elevator, bowed the cop inside. The doors shut and the car hummed upward. Millard turned away toward the hubbub outside and came face to

face with Lew Stendahl, who had just come in.

Stendahl was a city detective out of central station, a solid, big-bodied man with graying blond hair, a hooked nose and a mean mouth. He wore a stained felt, a shiny serge suit, and he eyed Millard speculatively.

"What gives, pal? How come I find you here?"

They weren't pals, but Millard grinned. He knew that every dick in the district who had been on the lookout for Eddie Fitz would soon be on hand, swarming around Bonelli's corpse like ants at a picnic. And Stendahl wasn't a bad guy. He was a nice guy when he had cushions under his big tail. But on his feet, at times his corns made him ugly.

"I was just passing by," Millard said. "I've been hanging around this district for the same reason you're here—out of curiosity to see if Eddie Fitz would show."

"Did he?"

"You ought to know. If he did, I didn't see him."

"Then who got Bonelli?"

Millard shrugged. "You tell me."

"Maybe I will. The rat sure had it coming, but whoever thought he'd get it this way? Tsk, tsk!" Stendahl grunted, grinned a slyly wicked grin. "You been doing a lot of hanging around Bonelli without any good reason—unless you got a client. And I find you here Johnny-on-the-spot without any good reason. Unless it's because you're gone on May Fitz, boy, and maybe you didn't like Bonelli making passes at her."

Millard's face darkened. "No cracks, Lew. Keep her name out of this. I was outside when Bonelli came out of that slide. I'm not pretending I'm sorry he got it, but don't try to drag me into it."

"Okay, okay." Stendahl made placating motions with his hands. "Hell, if you did it, the city would owe you a vote of thanks. Been up above?"

"No. Heroes die young. A prowl

car cop wanted to have first crack at the killer, so I let him."

"If he's up there," Stendahl said, "he won't get down now. This dragon thing is covered plenty. He won't have a chance."

"Yeah," Millard muttered, liking it because the detective had jumped to the natural conclusion that the killer was a man. "But he won't be up there now. Whoever the guy is, he had time to get down."

He indicated the door leading out back, and Stendahl was just turning toward it when he paused, knifed a glance at the man who had stepped in through the entrance at the rear of the ticket booth.

"I see the vultures are gathering," he cracked dryly.

THE newcomer was a tall military figure of a man in a gray suit as immaculate as the black tie which matched his keen eyes. Lean-hipped, square-shouldered, with a sharp chin and nose, he was an investigator for the Better Citizenship League named Cosgrave.

He was always around, sticking his face in politely whenever anything broke, getting in the hair of the police department. He was tolerated because he had the Better Citizenship League behind him, and the League had swung the recall that had swept Mayor Peters into office.

He twisted his lips wryly. "As one vulture to another, I'm among friends I hope. Birds of a feather and stuff. So Bonelli got it, huh?"

"If he didn't, he's sure playing a hell of a convincing practical joke on somebody," Stendahl snorted. "What do *you* think?"

"I think Eddie Fitz is a damn fast worker, if it was Fitz," Cosgrave said. "Though how he got through the net you coppers laid around this district is something you boys will have to explain to the mayor. Hello, Millard."

Millard grunted a greeting, and just then the elevator car dropped in

the shaft and the door slid back. Stepping out, the bluecoat nodded to Stendahl in recognition, growled disappointedly:

"There ain't nobody up there, sarge."

"Tsk, tsch," Stendahl clicked. "That's too bad. It looks like maybe he got away."

He pushed through the door leading out back and the others followed him through. Under the spidery structure of the roller coaster the pier was largely open. Water glinted darkly against the slimy piles, little collars of white foam frilling around them and breaking as the tide rocked back and forth. Cosgrave pointed to a straight ladder leading down to the water.

"Hell, he could have gone down that and into a boat. Easy enough to slip away under the pier. Maybe that's the way he got by your dragnet. All he'd have to do was to get some one to lure Bonelli up in this tower on some pretext or other."

Millard thought of May Fitz and there seemed to be a tight band around his throat. He had a hard time getting out words, but he played up to Cosgrave's lead. Gazing up a continuation of the ladder that climbed the back of the elevator shaft, he said:

"Sure. That ladder runs clear to the top. Anyone could have gone up and down it."

Stendahl took a look, nodded and hunched his shoulders. "Amazing, Sherlocks! Far be it from me for an ordinary police dick to say you super-leuths might be wrong."

He led the way back inside. The crowd was still out in front, being pushed back by a squad of bluecoats, but most of the plainclothes cops had come inside. One of them, King—an investigator from the D.A.'s office—was questioning a thin freckled-faced kid of about eighteen. The freckles stood out like splatters of orange paint on the kid's white skin. He was scared stiff and wobbling.

"I took him up first, and then a

little later a girl—a lady—and then I come down and jeest—!" He gagged, pointing a shaking hand out toward the dragon's mouth. "He—I heard a woman scream and I ran out there and he'd come out of the slide and jeest!—he was all dead and bloody!"

King was young and clean-cut, too handsome. He had curly black hair, a hard-chiseled jaw, and was filled with a sense of his own importance, "Who was this girl—this lady?"

"Jest!" The elevator operator shook his head, grimacing. "I dunno! I never seen her before."

"What'd she look like?" King snapped.

"I dunno. She was wearing a veil-like over her face—a scarf."

King was impatient. "Well, was she fat, thin, tall, small? Think, man! What was she wearing?"

The kid's hand wavered up and down before his face. "She was about so big, I think. With a nice build!"

"You would notice that. And you never brought her down?"

"No. Maybe she's still up there!"

"No, she isn't," the prowler car copper who had gone aloft said. "Nobody's up there now."

Millard was easing toward the door, had almost made it when King saw him from the corner of an eye, cracked:

"Where you going?"

"Out," Millard said. "Got any objections?"

"Yes. Maybe I want to ask you some questions. Stick around. What were you doing here?"

KING griped Millard. He'd never liked the guy's attitude. He was too smart for his own good and they'd clashed before, with no love lost on either side. Now, Millard told him: "Stendahl's got everything I know about this, and that's nothing. I was outside on the pier when Bonelli came down."

"Yeah?" King's eyes were thin. "What were you doing around here?"

"Maybe I was just out for a stroll," Millard said caustically.

"And maybe you were strolling this way for a reason. I'm going to get your license some day, Millard, and it looks like that day may not be far off."

Millard's lips jerked. "Okay, but in the meantime you can go to hell. Take a look out back and maybe you'll see how the killer got in and out—if you can take time off from trying to impress on the boys how tough you can be."

The boys weren't taking sides. King wasn't popular with many members of the police department. The D.A. investigator leveled an arm at Millard, warned:

"You stick around till the homicide squad gets here."

Then he swiveled and went through the door at the rear. Most of the others followed. Only Stendahl and Cosgrave and the elevator boy stayed behind with Millard, and they had their backs turned to him when he slipped out the front way.

CHAPTER III

HOTEL AMBUSCADE



THE harness cops were still holding back the staring, jabbering crowd,

and some one had found a canvas tarp to throw over the body in the dragon's mouth. It couldn't be moved till the homicide squad and coroner's man arrived from the center of downtown.

Millard ducked through into the crowd before he could be stopped, plowed forward through the mass of struggling humanity that was fighting for a glimpse of death-by-violence. He had to get away, get to May and warn her before King had a chance to talk to Stendahl or jump to the ob-

vious conclusion that the lady who had been taken up in the elevator after Bonelli was May Fitz.

After he got free from the jam around the Dragon Slide, the rest of pier was almost deserted. Only a few barkers were half-heartedly trying to compete against the free attraction of murder, and there were few potential customers left, only those hurrying to join the rest of the crowd.

He went past vacant booths, past a Swami fortune teller's stand, circled around through the parking space at the end of the pier behind the Regina Ballroom. Then he followed the side rail of the pier back towards Ocean Front.

The midway had only one bright face and that was for cash customers. Back here it was like any alley, and there was no moon. The papers had called for rain before morning. Up ahead of Millard in the shadows somewhere was the rear door of the Women's Rest Room.

May Fitz should be inside, and he didn't know how he was going to get her out unless he went in after her. And if he had to, he'd do that.

But he didn't have to. A siren was screaming down on Ocean Front, knifing up the pier. The sound, probably heralding the arrival of more police, must have scared May Fitz into fearing she would be trapped in the rest room. Like a bird startled from cover, she burst from the rest-room doorway, walked swiftly away toward the boardwalk.

Though she flitted through the shadows, Millard knew instinctively it was May. He moved after her, almost called out, then hesitated and changed his mind, following from a distance and keeping to the shadows also.

Passing the rest-room doorway, he caught a faint whiff of her perfume through the rank smell of the ocean. He was certain then, but still let her do the leading, impelled by a certain curiosity, a dread.

When she reached the main drag,

mingling with passersby under the lights, a big blue bus was just loading to pull out. She boarded it. Millard tailed the bus in a cab. It cruised to the center of the beach business district where May alighted and changed to a taxi.

When she paid off the driver, it was a spot near the water-front again, a rundown half-deserted district of dark streets and darker alleys. Millard got rid of his cab a square and a half behind her, waited in a doorway till she, after looking around, walked half a block and entered a door under a feeble night lamp that burned before an old frame building.

Striding toward it, he saw that it was a cheap hotel, only three stories.

The clerk at the desk was hostile at first, but the sight of Millard's special shield made him wilt as if he were scared green. He stuttered a room number and Millard went up the stairs. There wasn't any elevator.

The hall on the third floor was silent and dim and musty, a moth-eaten runner under his feet. Millard located the door that had the number the clerk had given him, had his gun out when he tried the knob. Unlocked, the door swung inward under the pressure of his hand, and May Fitz stood facing him in the center of the room.

Her hands were clenched at her breast and her eyes stared at him in glassy despair. Millard stepped inside, his dark eyes wary, watchful.

"Hello, May."

SHE didn't answer. She didn't say anything. She just stood there, staring as if mesmerized. Something was wrong. He should have known that, but he didn't get it for a moment—and a moment was too long. The door slammed shut behind him and a blunt steel ring dug into his spine.

"Hold it, mister dick," a taut voice breathed. "And let the heater slide."

Millard's muscles had gone rigid, but he let them relax. His face was

a mask, his gaze bitter as it held on the girl. She had helped trap him. He thumbed the safety of his automatic to the on position, let it drop gently to the carpet, said:

"Eddie—for Pete's sake take it easy. I didn't come here for you."

The gun in his back spurred him forward. "Not much you didn't! You private eyes are all alike; you'd sell out your own mother for a little gelt on the line. I know damn well you're working for this new reform mayor."

May Fitz quailed back under Millard's accusing gaze. Fingers went to her quivering lips and she sobbed, "Oh, Eddie!" and swung away to a corner. Millard noticed the phone on the wall and made a mental note to sock the desk clerk on his way out—if he got out. The clerk had used the phone to warn Eddie Fitz.

He pivoted. Fitz stood before the door, an ugly snub-nosed revolver glittering in his right fist. He looked hard and cold, his gray eyes snapping nervously. He was a man of about the same build as Millard, lean and lithe, with sharp sensitive facial features, some gray at his temples.

"You lousy heel," he said softly. "Playing up to May—using her—gaining her confidence so you could tail her to me. But you're not taking me, mister dick."

Millard's face was dark with anger. "You'll eat those words before you're through, Eddie. Use your head. I'm only trying to help May."

"That's why you followed her here, huh?" Fitz kneeled and scooped up Millard's gun, circled around the room and thrust the automatic at his sister. "Take this, May, and hold it on him till I get away. I can't stick around here now. This guy may have some pals behind him."

May took the gun reluctantly, unwillingly, holding it in both hands, her eyes pleading with her brother through a sheen of tears.

"Keep your chin up, kid," he told her tightly. "And, just in case—"

He whirled, swung the snub-nosed

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revolver in a winking arc. The movement was sudden, swift, and it caught Millard by surprise. He tried to duck, bob sidewise, but the gun barrel cracked against his forehead, a slanting blow that knocked him backward on his heels. He fell to the floor, half-stunned, and without putting up a hand could feel the egg starting to hatch.

May didn't scream. She wasn't that kind. But she stood biting her lip, and holding the automatic pointed down at Millard in trembling hands. Her eyes were blinded by tears.

"So long, kid," Eddie Fitz said. "I'll be seeing you."

He was at the window, sliding it up and stepping through to the fire escape outside, still watching Millard. Millard stared back, his face drawn and sullen, making no effort to move.

The window came down and Eddie Fitz disappeared. Millard pressed a palm against the swelling on his forehead, climbed slowly to his feet, swayed, then weaved across to the window.

The cold eye of his own automatic followed him, guided by May Fitz' hands, but she didn't speak as he shoved the window up, looked out and down through the rungs of the fire escape.

DOWN below, the alley was a slot of blackness. He thought he saw a shadow moving away across a vacant lot at the rear. Turning from the window, he braced himself against the wall and looked at May, a sardonic warp to his lips.

"Okay," he muttered. "He's gone. He broke loose to get Bonelli. You lured Bonelli to the Dragon Tower for him, and now you help him to get away. I'm not blaming *you*. May. After all, he's your brother. But where does that put you. It makes you an accessory."

"No!" she cried softly, shaking her head. "He didn't kill Bonelli! He didn't!"

"How do you know he didn't?"

"I—" Her throat tightened and she had to lower her head. "I just know he didn't. He—he—"

"He's your brother and he wouldn't do anything like that, is that it?" He shook his head, grimacing. "This is a hell of a thing for you to be mixed in. I seem to be butting in where I'm not wanted, but I wish there was something I could do to help you."

"You've done enough." Her voice was desperate, hopeless. She raised her head and reproached him: "Why did you follow me here?"

"To warn you," he said and let a bitter breath explode. "That's kind of funny now. The elevator boy remembered taking you up in the tower just after Bonelli, and he gave your description to the cops that came. It won't take long for them to put two and two together and tumble that you were there."

"Oh. . . ." The gun drooped to her side and she stared at him in fearful concern, her mouth lax.

He straightened, frowning. "Why were you there, May? I've got to know."

She blinked and glistening tears fell out of her eyes. She was not crying now, but her long lashes were wet. "Bonelli called me on the phone. He wanted to see me, suggested meeting there, said it was very important and concerned Eddie. I think he was afraid Eddie was after him, had broken loose to get him, and he wanted to reach Eddie first through me with a proposition—beg off, make a deal. Nobody was there when I went up. I—I thought he hadn't arrived yet."

The welt on Millard's forehead was an angry red, but beneath it his face looked thoughtful. "You told Eddie you were going?"

"Yes. He got in touch with me by phone, too. He said to tell Bonelli—" Her eyes opened wide and she clapped a hand to her mouth, realizing too late that she had admitted her brother knew that Bonelli would be in the Dragon Slide Tower at a certain

hour, could have preceded him there and waited for him.

Then her eyes, still staring, changed direction and expression, jerking past his shoulder to the door. Millard hadn't heard it open, but when he swung around the first of the two hoods was already in the room.

He was short and stubby, with a flat shoe-horn nose and dark-stubbed jowls. The blued barrel of the automatic jutting from his fist looked like an undersized cannon. He motioned jerkily with it, and his voice had the metallic cadence of an Oriental's.

"Lift 'em—lift 'em! Drop the rod, sister."

She stared down in surprise at the gun in her hand, dropped it as if it were a hot coal. Then she looked up and cried shakily:

"Who are you? What do you want?"

The stubby man didn't answer her. He said, off the side of his lips: "Get that roscoe, Joe, while I frisk the umpchay."

Joe, the other man, had a cleft red chin and the stolid eyes of a doll. He nodded, closed the door behind him, crossed swiftly past Millard and picked up Millard's automatic that May had let drop.

"What is this?" Millard rapped tightly as the other one got behind him, slapped his pockets. "I'm not heeled."

"So you ain't! Keep those flippers up and just take it easy, sport." The man got a fistful of the back of Millard's collar, jerked hard. "Sid-down!"

Yanked off balance, Millard sat down abruptly in a straight-back chair that was behind him. Pain flared in his head and he clamped his teeth to hold back a hot surge of anger. The man stayed behind him, behind the back of his chair.

"All right, sister," he rasped. "Where's Eddie?"

She turned a startled white face to him. "Eddie—!"

"Yeh—Eddie. We want him, catch

on? He was supposed to be here. Where is he?"

Her eyes narrowed and she asked swiftly: "What do you want him for?"

The monotonous voice dropped half a tone, hitting a sinister minor note. "Never mind what for. Where is he?"

A hardness gathered about her firm little jaw. "I don't know."

"So you don't know. Well, you're his sister, and I think you do. Talk or Joe will show you a few tricks that'll make you wish you had."

JOE, standing back away from her, nodded and grinned eagerly. Alarm enlarged her eyes, but her jaw set with a fierce stubbornness. Millard, sitting tensely on the edge of his chair, bit out:

"You rats! She told you she didn't know. Maybe he was here, but he's gone now. You can see that for yourself."

Gun-steel gouged his neck from behind, and the one with the stubbed jowls warned him: "You keep out of this. Keep your big yap closed, unless you know where Eddie is. If you do, you better spill if you don't want to see your sugar take a working over."

"He doesn't know!" May Fitz whispered tensely, and her eyes were glowing like twin fire opals. "And I don't either."

Behind Millard, the stubby man snarled disgustedly: "Okay, Joe. Go to work on her."

Joe licked his curved heavy lips and put Millard's gun down on a table by the bed. May swung to face him, cringed away as he advanced on her. He took a fast step, and his hands moved like clockwork, chopping her face with precise slapping blows.

Her head jumped on her slim shoulders and her hat was knocked askew, letting down a lock of her soft brown hair. Quick red patches sprouted under her smooth cheekbones as she backed away, trying to

protect her face, but she didn't cry out.

Millard swore aloud and started to rise. Steel rammed into his kidney and the voice behind said: "Try it and you'll get a gut full of lead."

Joe stopped to look around over his shoulder. Millard, shaking with helpless fury, sat down slowly, gritted: "Tell them, May. If you know where he's gone—for heaven's sake, tell them!"

She looked straight at Millard, shook her head and clipped out firmly: "I don't know."

At a sign from the blue-jowled one, Joe went back to work. Millard's eyes were tight and narrowed, breath pumping through his nostrils and a muscle twitching in his taut cheek. Joe stalked her. She backed toward the bed and did not stop when he snarled:

"Stand still!"

Angered, Joe jumped at her, swung one arm and drove a fist against her mouth. Blood spurted from her lips like the juice from a crushed pomegranate. She was knocked backwards, arms and legs waving wildly, hitting the bed and landing on it.

A cold and reckless rage was on Millard. At that moment he lunged furiously from his chair.

There was a harsh oath and a quick step behind him. Millard ducked, still driving forward, and the big blued automatic chopped down on his head like an axe hitting a log. He dived headfirst to the floor and lay still as a felled tree.

CHAPTER IV

ESCAPE SANCTUARY



SOME ONE was pouring cold water over his head and face and it felt very good. Gasping for breath, he choked out, "Don't drown me!" and

opened his eyes, forced them into

focus. He was still on the floor, on his back now, and Cosgrave, Stendahl and King were standing over him.

Millard put a hand to the back of his head, felt the sticky warmth of blood in his damp hair, tried to sit up. His brain throbbed violently with the movement, sent a wave of nausea through him, and he almost did another blackout while the room and everything in it rocked and rolled. He sank back and Stendahl was on one knee beside him.

"What gives, pal?" the police dick asked gruffly. "You better take it easy a minute. Who slugged you?"

"You tell me and I'll know," Millard muttered, keeping his eyes closed. "A couple of out-of-town loogans. I never saw the guys before. They were looking for Eddie Fitz, but they weren't any of his old boys."

The curt voice of the D.A. investigator, King, knifed down at him: "Where's the girl?"

Millard winced. "What girl?"

"You know what girl. May Fitz. The tail I put on you saw you follow her away from the pier before he lost you. She was up in that Dragon Tower. She killed Bonelli and you were covering her. You even helped her get away."

King's tone was nasty, and Millard opened his eyes to slits, glared up at the too-handsome clean-cut face. "Nuts to you. If I was following her, how could I be helping her? And what makes you think she was up in that tower?"

King's smile was most supercilious. "We got it from Lefty Reid. Bonelli went up there to meet May Fitz. He knew that much, and he tipped us to this hideout. He knew of it from the old days."

"So you're taking that rat's word for it? I suppose he's got an alibi."

"Sure." King's smile was even broader. He was enjoying himself. "But maybe you don't want us to take his word for anything. You're his alibi. He says he was talking to you

just before Bonelli came out of the chute. That right?"

Millard's lips jerked ruefully. "Yeah."

"Then he's *your* alibi—but that doesn't let you out, sweetheart. You're in this right up to your lily-white neck—as an accessory. I told you to stick around back there till the homicide squad got there, but instead you had to sneak out to make sure May Fitz got away. You're nuts about her, that's no secret, and why I didn't tumble before—I'll get more than your license out of this and I don't mean maybe."

"The hell you will." Millard sat up, and it was better this time, though the effort made him dizzy and pain pounded in his skull. "No matter what you say about May Fitz, and I'm not admitting any of it, you haven't got anything on me. You can't even hold me, so think that over." He looked around. "I could use a drink. Anybody got a bottle?"

"Here." Cosgrave uncapped a curved metal hip flask, handed it down to Millard, grinned crookedly. "The doomed man drank a hearty breakfast."

King was on his way to the phone, snapping back over his shoulder: "We'll see about this! I'm phoning Wilson. I'll get a warrant if I have to."

Wilson was the district attorney.

"The hell you will," Millard repeated and tilted the flask, let the liquor gurgle down his throat. It was good rye and its heat spread through him and gave him new strength.

KING had stopped at the phone and was staring back, evidently bothered by Millard's matter-of-fact tone. Stendahl, on his feet, seemed worried and harassed, rubbing his hooked nose.

"Hell, Millard," he said. "You can't just walk out of here without any explanation at all. We've got enough to hold you." He shot an uneasy glance at King, looked back. "Not

that I want to, pal. If you can just explain what gives."

"Thanks," Millard said, including both Stendahl and Cosgrave in it, and handing back the flask. He climbed to his feet, knowing that he couldn't bluff this out, that he'd have to play his ace in the hole. "Let me use that phone first, and I'll show you why I'm going to walk out of here."

He wobbled toward King, but King didn't move aside. "Who you going to call?" he demanded suspiciously.

"You'll know soon enough. I'll let you talk to him."

Curiosity as much as anything else caused King to finally give ground reluctantly. "Okay, but if you're trying to pull some kind of a fast one—"

Millard took down the receiver, waited till some one answered at the switchboard downstairs, then gave a private unlisted number. As soon as the connection was put through, he said:

"Chief—this is Millard. I'm in sort of a jam or I wouldn't have called. This Bonelli killing got dumped in my lap—you must have heard about it by now. . . . Yeah. And trying to find out what's behind it, I've got mixed up with King from the D.A.'s office again. . . . Overzealous is what *you* might call him, but I've got another name for it.

"The cluck is in my hair, thinks I'm trying to shield the Fitz girl or something. He wants to run me in for a session in the sweat box. He was just on the point of calling Wilson so I thought I'd better call you first. Speak with him, huh?"

A red stain was on King's cheekbones and his eyes burned with suppressed fury as Millard turned from the phone, bowed mockingly to him. He snatched up the receiver, spoke sharply into the mouthpiece.

"Who is this?"

A voice rattled in the receiver and he said, "Oh!" in a subdued tone, listened while the voice went on telling him things.

Millard lit a cigarette while Sten-

dahl and Cosgrave eyed him curiously. Then King said, "Yes. Yes, if that's the case, of course. Yes, sir," and hung up slowly. He swung around and there was a sulkily angry look to his face; his eyes still fumed. He was a poor loser.

"Who was it?" Stendahl asked, unable to hold back the question.

"Mayor Peters," King snapped with unconcealed ill-grace. "It seems Millard is the mayor's personal representative or something!"

"Oh!" Stendahl's brows went up and he stared at Millard.

Cosgrave spread his crooked grin. "So, you're working for his nibs."

"Yeah." Millard nodded. "Just doing a little scouting around, looking into who and what's behind this petition that's being circulated to divorce the beach towns from the city. I found out enough to know it was Bonelli and the gambling syndicate."

"If I get the goods on it, the mayor could kill the petitions with a news release. Maybe he won't have to now, with Bonelli in happier hunting grounds. This is all on the q.t., so keep it under your collective hats."

Stendahl nodded, but had seemed to draw frigidly back into himself, suspicious antagonism coming into his eyes. Cosgrave, his tall military figure always at ease, probably put some of the police detective's thoughts into words as he complained with mock petulance:

"That's a hell of a note. Here the Better Citizenship League gets O'Brien recalled and Peters elected, and the new mayor hires his own undercover investigator. I work for the League, and if they find this out I'm liable to be out of a job. But maybe we could join forces, huh, Millard?"

"Maybe," Millard said. "But I'm washed up for tonight. You guys can carry on."

He recovered his hat but didn't put it on, spotted his gun on the table where Joe had evidently left it, went over and retrieved it, started for the door. With one hand on the knob, he

looked back at King. "No hard feelings, huh?"

The D.A.'s face was cold and expressionless, his lips thin, a smoldering fire banked in his eyes. He didn't answer.

Millard moved one shoulder, his mouth hardening. "Okay. If that's the way you want it."

"Where's May Fitz?" King ground out.

MILLARD was staring into space and his eyes were haggard. "I don't know. She's gone—and you better get a tag out for those two mutts." He gave a brief word picture of the two men who had been in the room before he'd been knocked out. He swallowed hard. "I'm afraid—they've got her."

Stendahl clipped: "I'll get their description sent out over the short wave."

Millard nodded tiredly, turned and went out into the hall.

With the door closed behind him, he stalked to the stairs and down. The picture of May was in his mind. He kept seeing her face wilt under Joe's fist, and forgot all about the fact that he was supposed to be working for a guy called mayor.

The two loogans had taken May away with them, and if Blue-Jowls and his cousin Joe were out-of-town hoods on their own, finding them would be next to impossible. But he *had* to find them, and when he did he'd beat the hell out of them.

This was the one thought in his brain, the one all-consuming purpose that motivated him now. His eyes were a little bit mad, the eyes of a man obsessed, and when he went up to the desk in the lobby the clerk quailed back behind it.

No one else was down there, nothing but old plush and dust. Millard reached across the desk and got hold of the clerk's necktie, jerked him forward till the shiny pimpled face was close to his own.

"You louse," he gritted. "Who were

those two gorillas you sent up after May Fitz? Where'd they take her?"

The clerk's hair was a greasy wig. His eyes batted and his neck had the palsy. "I don't know!" he whined. "Honest! I never seen them before. They don't belong to the syndicate. They weren't any of Eddie Fitz' old strong-arm boys."

Millard's eyes narrowed, believing the man against his will. "Eddie might know them. I've got to find Eddie," he muttered almost to himself, then viciously shook the necktie. "Where would he be?"

The clerk gagged. "I don't know! He only holed up here tonight."

"When?"

"Early. He went out and just got back again before his sister and you came."

"Yeah? Well this is for tipping him off that I was on my way up to his room."

Millard shoved and the clerk slammed back against the wall, fell to the floor. Millard strode outside into the night.

The clubbing his skull had taken hadn't done his head any good and he was finding it hard to think. A minor concussion can make a guy do funny things. Your brain can be clear as a bell one minute, dull and hazy the next. He walked for several blocks with the ocean breeze cool against his fevered face.

He knew there was no use in going to May's apartment. The hoods wouldn't take her there, and Eddie would steer clear of that vicinity because he would know the cops had it staked out, hoping for him to show there. Eddie still had friends, but he was very hot right now and not the kind of a guy who would embarrass a pal by moving in on him in that condition.

Unaccountably Millard thought of Sunshine Beer. Before Eddie Fitz had been indicted, Sunshine Beer had been on tap in every joint and gin mill in town—the only out-of-town draught beer sold locally. The local brew-

eries hadn't liked this cutting into their business by an outsider, but Sunshine Beer had some kind of a deal with the syndicate that controlled the city, and the syndicate's word was law to all liquor dealers.

The syndicate still had a lot of power in the dives and night spots, but since Bonelli had stepped into Fitz' shoes, Sunshine Beer hadn't been able to place a keg behind any bar in the city.

There seemed to be a connection of some kind between that and the present situation, but Millard's fuzzy brain couldn't tell him just what it was at the moment. Anyway, Sunshine Beer had a local warehouse, though it had closed down. Eddie Fitz had been friendly to Sunshine Beer, and the warehouse would make a good hideout.

It was screwy reasoning, more hunch than anything else, because his brain was looping around in circles. But the warehouse would be as good a starting point as any. He went into the first drug store he came to, found the phone booth and called a cab.

FROM outside, the warehouse bulked huge and dark. It was a hangar type of building, constructed of brick and corrugated steel sheeting. Millard told his cab driver to beat it, crossed the street as the tail-light winked away around a corner, and found a small door beside a pair of great sliding doors for trucks at the front. All the doors were locked and the one narrow window had bars over it.

Along the side of the building he found more windows, also barred—at the rear another door, opening on a cobbled alley. He pushed on it and it gave. He stepped through into inky darkness, his gun held low in his hand.

A muffled rumbling sound came to him—a voice speaking somewhere behind closed doors—and off to the right there was a thin streak of

brightness along the floor. He went toward it, and the rumbling grew louder, but individual words remained indistinct. The streak of brightness marked the bottom of a closed door. He found the knob, twisted it and punched it away from him.

"Hold it!" he bit out. "Don't move."

The room was a small windowless office, a green-shaded droplight hanging from the ceiling. The tense back of Lefty Reid was to Millard, and he was holding a gun on Eddie Fitz, who stood against the opposite wall.

Reid jerked his weasel face back over his shoulder and shot a glance at Millard, seemed about to whirl with his gun, but didn't. Sweat glistened on Fitz' forehead. He looked across Reid's shoulder and breathed, with something like relief in his tone:

"Hello, mister dick."

Millard stood on wide-spread feet in the doorway, his chin low on his chest, his eyes tight and watchful under the dark bruise on his forehead. "What goes on?" he growled.

Watching Reid, Eddie Fitz said: "This stooge of Bonelli's is a junkie and he's gone out and got coked to the eyes. He's got some screwy idea I knocked off his boss and wants to fog me for it. I've been trying to argue him out of it."

"Didn't you?" Millard muttered. "Didn't you knock off Bonelli?"

Reid was almost dancing with tension. Before Fitz could answer he spat with hysterical exultance: "I knew you'd come here! I laid for you, you louse!" The nicked revolver quivered in his hand.

"Don't do it," Millard warned harshly. "I've got a gun in your back, Weasel."

Reid's shoulders twitched and he suddenly got very still, every muscle in his body drawing tight.

Eddie Fitz rubbed his palms slowly together, his narrow gaze always watching Reid. "What'd you come here for, Millard?"

"I came looking for you. They've got May."

Fitz' eyes jerked to Millard. "Who?"

"I thought maybe you'd know them," Millard ground out. "A couple of out-of-town torpedoes who came looking for you. A big bruiser named Joe, and a stocky guy with a flat nose."

Eddie Fitz shook his head, a sudden drawn look of apprehension on his sensitive face. "I don't know them." Wild light shimmered in his eyes. "Damn! I've got to get out of here. I've got to get May!"

"No you don't!" Reid lippered tightly, hunching forward a little. He was keyed up to the danger point, on edge.

"Where is she?" Millard rapped. "You know?"

"She isn't here," Fitz hammered swiftly. "I know one other place they might be holding her—if I'm right. You've got to get me out from under this cluck's gun, Millard!"

"All I care about right now is May," Millard said coldly. "Where would they be holding her, and why?"

"That's all I care about, too, you fool!" Fitz cried hoarsely. "What's the matter with you? If I've got this figured right, they're holding her because they think I know who killed Bonelli, and as long as they've got her they know I won't talk."

"Do you know?" Millard's eyes were hooded.

"I can guess, anyway. And I'm right if they've got her where I think they have. I know what's behind this killing, but I couldn't hang it on anyone without proof." There was sweating desperation in Fitz' voice.

"Help me get May, and I'll give you the killer. I don't give a damn what happens to me after that. I'll give myself up to you. But if you care anything for May you've got to give me a chance to get her before they fill her full of slugs!"

If it was an act, it was a damned good one, and Millard was suddenly prodded by an urgency for haste. "Okay," he said. "Drop it, Weasel."

REID began to quiver. He sobbed out, "No!" and whirled in a crouch, his gun swinging toward Millard, jerking and yammering. Instinctively, Millard ducked back around the door frame and splinters were gouged from the casing before his face.

He stuck his gun and one eye out around the edge, but held his fire. Eddie Fitz had stepped fast up behind Reid, swinging a fist that caught the weasel-faced man right under the ear.

Reid dropped to the floor and Fitz brought his heel down on the wrist of the hand that held the gun. Reid yowled in pain, threshing on the floor. Millard was through the doorway by then, and he laid the flat barrel of his automatic against Reid's skull. Breath went out of the threshing man and he relaxed and became still.

Millard tapped him again to make sure he wasn't shamming. Eddie Fitz scooped up the revolver, clipped, "Come on," and strode out of the room.

Millard followed, and they went out the back door, across the alley and through a dark passageway to the next street. Fitz swung open the doors of a shed next to another dark warehouse and there was a small black sedan inside.

Millard got in beside Fitz without asking any questions, and Fitz gunned the motor to life, whipped the car out in reverse, sent it up the street in a zooming drive, heading for the road that ran along the coast. Hunched over the wheel, Fitz said:

"I guess I had you wrong, Millard. I'm sorry about clipping you back there at the hotel. I guess I should have stuck around."

"Skip it," Millard grunted.

"Skip it, hell. I won't forget this, mister. You could have let that hop-head take me back there, or you could turn me in. But instead you're giving me a chance."

"Maybe I'm only thinking of May—not you."

"Yeah." Fitz nodded, went on bitterly: "You ought to hate my guts, mister. I'm the one who turned May against you. She went for you plenty, but she turned you down on my say-so. You were a private eye, and I couldn't trust any of that breed on principle—not in my business."

"She gave you the go-bye for me, out of a screwy sense of loyalty or something. May's that way. I've taken care of her since we were kids, and even if she didn't like the business I was in, she stuck by me."

Millard felt slow heat flush through him. "You lousy heel! So that's why—"

"Yeah, that's why. Okay, I'm a heel. But I don't go back on my word. I was wrong and I know it now. That's why I'm telling you this, and it still isn't too late for—you and May."

Millard's heart was hammering queerly. He pushed a hand across his eyes hard, trying to get rid of the cobwebs in his brain. "I hope that's right. Because she's still the only one in my books, Eddie. Maybe you're not such a bad guy at that. I always said you were on the square—but you were sure in a lousy business for May to be associated with."

"I know it." Fitz had the car roaring north along the coast highway, and there wasn't much traffic at this hour. "Don't you think I can see that now? Look at the lousy publicity she got—her name smeared all over the papers at the time of my trial. She stuck by me, but look at the spot it's got her in now. I'm a heel, but I'm going to get her out of it if it's the last thing I ever do."

"You and me together, pal. What'd you make that break for anyway?"

"It was a mistake," Fitz said. "I know that now. But they practically asked for it, gave me the chance on a platter. The temptation was too strong and I took it. I thought I'd come back and straighten out a few things before they put me away for keeps."

"Such as fixing Bonelli's wagon?" Millard suggested, looking at him from the corners of his eyes.

Fitz' gaze didn't leave the road, but his answer had a hard overtone. "I'm not talking about that yet, even to you—not till we get May out of the spot she's in. Take care of her, will you, Millard, after—I'm gone?"

"I'll take care of her if she'll let me," Millard promised in an undertone that was almost like a prayer. "But can't you get any more knots out of this hoopie?"

Instead of answer, Fitz eased the car abruptly before a café that had a lighthouse tower and faced the ocean. He swung sharply to the right in a slewing hairpin turn, up and into a steep grade that climbed the face of the palisades, zigzagging back and forth.

The car roared to the top and they cut to the left, swung down through the side of a wide canyon, slowed into a dark side street. Fitz cut the lights and ignition.

CHAPTER V

HOMICIDE PAYOFF



IT was a blind street and down at its end a white fence blocked the road, visible in the light that seeped from the windows of a lone house standing there. Off in back, under the clouds was the hunched dark purple of the Santa Monica mountains. The other way, and far below, was the blackness of the sea.

Fitz was out of the car before it came to a full stop, the gun in his hand and motioning Millard to follow. He cut off in a wide circle across the vacant stretch between the car and the house. There was some scrub growth, and he slid along behind it, taking what advantage he could of

its cover. Millard was right behind him.

They stopped, crouched low behind some brush, not ten yards from the rear of the house, a low stucco bungalow. Most of the windows here at the rear were dark, the shades drawn. Fitz' low voice came flat and emotionless as that of a deaf man:

"I'll take the back. You take the front. I'll wait till you get set, then we'll both bust in at the same time. That way we ought to catch them by surprise."

"How about taking it easy?" Millard argued. "If May's in there, we don't want to take any chances on her being hurt."

"Okay," Fitz snapped impatiently, like a dog straining on a leash. "I'll try to find a way in back here. You take the front, find a window you can see into and cover them from there."

Millard crawled away, ducking low and going along the side of the house. At the first lighted window he came to, he rose and tried to see inside, but the shade was drawn to the very bottom. He was moving on when from somewhere within came a woman's cry, as piercing as it was low.

He stopped cold and his neck bristled like a dog's. He knew that voice, knew it belonged to May.

A shiver drove through him, rattled his teeth. And it wasn't a cold night. It was warm, a night to make love. He heard Eddie Fitz' feet pounding toward the back door. Fitz had heard that cry, too.

Millard was suddenly plunging recklessly for the front of the house, but he hadn't made the corner before he heard Eddie Fitz crash in through the back door. It sounded as if he took the whole door with him. And then, while Millard was bounding around to the front porch, guns began to bellow and roar inside the house.

He was up on the porch, going for a front window, when the front door whipped open. The automatic flipped up in Millard's hand, but before he squeezed trigger, a shot thundered

within, and the man who had opened the door flinched and grunted as lead slapped into him.

It was Blue-Jowls—the one with the flat shoe-horn nose. Millard stooped and got his gun, stared inside. Eddie Fitz lay on the floor at the end of a hallway straight back from the door. He lay on his chest, facing Millard, and with his right arm outstretched and smoke eddying upward from the revolver in his hand. He was grinning, and his grin was red with blood.

Silence, following the abrupt cessation of sound, seemed to ring through the house. Then, from somewhere, May Fitz' voice cried shakily: "Eddie! Eddie! Are you all right? Eddie . . .!"

Millard had stepped over Blue-Jowls and was in the hallway when Eddie Fitz rolled over on his side and tried to answer his sister. Only a thick gurgling came from his throat. Millard dropped to one knee beside him, and the stricken man stared up with bright, feverish eyes.

Blood was pumping in vivid jets from a ragged hole in his neck. Fitz had shot it out with Blue-Jowls, killed the other man after taking a slug in his own throat.

SWEARING harshly, Millard tried to staunch the flow of blood with a handkerchief, knowing all along it was hopeless. "You crazy dope," he said hoarsely. "Barging in like that! It took guts, I'll say that. But look what it got you. Who killed Bonelli, Eddie? What's behind this?"

Fitz strained upward, sent his eyes and one arm slanting in through a doorway to a dining room. There were chairs drawn up to the table, glasses on the table top—and several empty beer cans. Golden cans with the label *Sunshine Beer* on them.

"Sunshine Beer!" Millard muttered, looking back down at Fitz.

Fitz nodded, trying to tell him something else with his eyes. His lips

moved, grimaced, and a crimson foam bubbled out, as if he'd been eating red soap. His glittering eyes skimmed over with a milklike film and his head dropped limply to one side. The blood wasn't pumping out of his neck any more. It was just a last thinning ooze.

"Eddie!" May's cry was shrill with anguish. "Eddie—answer me!"

Millard got erect slowly, feeling very old and tired, moved toward the sound of her voice. He found her in a bedroom outside of whose door lay the big bruiser Joe, dead as his partner was out in the front doorway. Joe had taken it through the guts and the chest, and he wasn't a pleasant sight for anyone, especially a distraught girl who was tied to the bed and couldn't get free and didn't have anything else to look at.

Millard stepped inside and closed the bedroom door on the corpse in the hall. May stared at him as if he were an apparition, whispered: "Chris. . . ."

She was on the bed, her wrists tied to the metal bars at her head, her ankles bound to the bars at the foot. Her clothing was disheveled, torn, her hair awry. There was a dark bruise low on one cheek and her lips were puffed and swollen.

Millard had lost his hat somewhere, and his lean face was lined, looked grim and haggardly compassionate as he crossed swiftly to her, began to work on the knots at her wrists. "The rats!" he choked. "What have they done to you, May?"

"Eddie!" she insisted frantically. "What's happened to him?"

He couldn't meet her eyes when they looked up at him like that, searching his face. He finished loosening the knots at her wrists, brought her arms down and held her hands in his, gazed down at them, said:

"He was a great guy, kid—no matter what others think, we know the truth. He went crazy when he heard you cry out in here, crashed in and

shot it out with those two mutts who were holding you."

"You mean"—her voice was hushed, unbelieving—"he's dead?"

Millard nodded, his mouth set grimly.

"Oh, Chris. . . ." Rising up, she leaned against him, clung to him, sobbing quietly. "I knew it. I knew it."

Millard had his arm around her. "He was going to tell me who got Bonelli. Now he can't. He'd want you to tell, May, if you know."

Her head moved negatively and she didn't look up. Her voice was muffled against his chest. "I don't know. Honestly, Chris."

His face was baffled, tortured. Hesitating, he stroked her hair, then forced out the questions he had to ask. "Who owns this hideout? What were they doing to you?"

"I don't know who owns it. They were holding me for someone else. They didn't tell me anything. But they were getting drunk on beer, and beginning to get ideas I didn't like. That's why I cried out. They—" She broke off in a spasm of sobbing, her shoulders jerking.

"Take it easy, honey," Millard said, holding her till the spasm passed. "Easy. . . ."

She subsided, rested weakly in his arms, seemingly sapped of strength, of all vitality. Her voice caught as she whispered: "Oh, Chris . . . he was all I had!"

"You've got *me*, honey," Millard told her. His voice was tender, but his face was grim. He knew that she was still in for a bad time of it. She wasn't out of the woods yet by a long way, and he couldn't see a clear path ahead.

"He asked me to take care of you —after he was gone. I wonder if he knew. . . ." Drawing a deep breath, he squeezed her shoulders, held her away from him. "I can't let him down. Let me untie your ankles, so we can get out of here."

AN HOUR later they were closeted in a back room of the Bayport precinct station with Lew Stendahl and a homicide dick named Hernandez. Hernandez was Mexican and had some Indian in him; his dark eyes were sharp and he was smart as a whip.

He was behind the desk, leaning back in a swivel chair with his hands clasped behind his head and a cigarette drooping from his thin lips. Stendahl stood at one side of the desk, watching Millard with open antagonism, his mouth pinched and mean.

"Hell," he said. "Why quibble? It's a lot simpler to just admit Fitz killed Bonelli, and then he got knocked off shooting it out with those two loogans. That makes it simpler all around."

Millard was leaning across the other side of the desk, a sheen of sweat glistening on his drawn face, under the light. "Sure, it does. Only Eddie didn't kill Bonelli. You're just trying to fix it so you can slap an accessory charge on May and myself. All that's troubling you—you don't like it because Peters saw fit to hire me to do some confidential work instead of entrusting it to the detective bureau. I'm an outsider, and that hurts—you resent it."

Hernandez' cigarette moved. "Give him a chance, Stendahl. This girl looks like she's been through about all she can stand."

May Fitz sat in a chair against the wall, her battered face dull and expressionless, her eyes staring at nothing. She was taking no apparent interest in the proceedings. Stendahl swung away, his lips jerking tight. Millard talked fast and earnestly, knowing it was for May's freedom and his.

"Sure she has. Those mutts! She was held by those loogans because they couldn't find Eddie, and the guy that hired them knew Eddie could figure out who had knocked off Bonelli. They were holding May as a hostage

just to make sure Eddie didn't speak out of turn before the killer could see him and fix things up. I guess he thought he could fix things up with Eddie, anyway."

Stendahl had swung back, propped a hip on the other corner of the desk, had his eyes lidded. He murmured: "It sounds like you're doing a lot of guessing."

Millard knifed him with a hard glance, wet his lips and addressed himself to Hernandez. "Look: Eddie as much as told me before he kicked off that the killer was some one who had something to do with Sunshine Beer. Sunshine Beer was on tap in every bar in town when Eddie was running things.

"Since Bonelli took over, Sunshine Beer has been out as far as selling it on draught goes. No bar in town would touch it. There's some double-dealing there somewhere. Under Bonelli, the syndicate clamped down on Sunshine Beer. Sunshine came in from out of town. Those hoods were out-of-town guys, and I bet if you backtrack on them you'll find they came from San Francisco, where the Sunshine Brewery's located.

"If you stop and think, there is one guy who was on the spot at that Dragon Slide who originally hails from Frisco, and who could have had the opportunity to knock off Bonelli. It all adds up, I tell you!"

"A good old-fashioned beer war, huh?" Hernandez grunted noncommittally. And Stendahl was suddenly very still, breathing tightly:

"Who is this guy?"

Millard looked at him, straightened up and said slowly, "I can't prove it, Lew—but I'm satisfied in my own mind, it's—"

He cut off, swinging around at a commotion outside the door. The door opened, and King and Cosgrave came in shoving Lefty Reid before them. A crowd of reporters outside the door were being held back by a couple of uniformed coppers.

Cosgrave closed the door behind

him, said, "Look what we've got!" as King pushed Lefty Reid forward.

Reid's weasel face was sullen, his lips twitching. His glittering eyes glared around, burned hate at Millard, and he stood back against the wall, half-crouching, like a cornered wild thing at bay. King spotted May Fitz, whirled on her. Leveling an arm dramatically, the D.A. investigator announced accusingly:

"There you are! You Jezbel!"

She looked up dully, a weak light of understanding flickering in her eyes, a slow fire of resentment starting to burn her cheeks. Millard took one step and struck King's arm down.

"Watch that smart lip of yours," he bit out. "I'm liable to knock a few teeth down your throat if you're not more careful."

STARTLED, King stepped back and blinked at Millard. Then his eyes narrowed and his lips closed firmly. "She was there. She was at the slide, and she had opportunity and motive."

"Okay, she was there," Millard growled. "But she didn't do it. She went to meet Bonelli. She'd talked to Eddie over the phone and she had a message from Eddie. Eddie wanted to arrange a meeting with Bonelli at a spot he picked himself. He didn't trust Bonelli. But she got there too late—Bonelli had already gone down the slide." He swung away, jabbed a dark look at Cosgrave. "Where'd you find Reid?"

Cosgrave was standing with his back to the door. He moved his military shoulders. "In the Sunshine Beer warehouse. Prowl car cops going by heard a shot in there and investigated. They found him unconscious and called in for an ambulance. I was with King and we caught the ambulance call on the short-wave in his car.

"We went to see what it was, and Reid had come out of it by then and we took him with us. He says you and Eddie Fitz knocked him out, and

you helped Eddie escape." On Millard, his gaze was doubtful, his tone half-accusing.

"Sure," Millard said. "Reid wanted to kill Eddie."

"By damn!" Stendahl exploded, standing up and facing Lefty Reid. "I just remembered—this rat comes from Frisco!"

Reid's sharp face was tight and twitching. King snapped an irritable glance around, clipped out:

"What is this, anyway?"

Hernandez, still leaning back behind the desk, spoke in a slow drawl. "Millard was just about to name the killer of Bonelli when you busted in. He claims it's some one from San Francisco."

"Well!" King faced the homicide lieutenant, fists planted on his hips. "This procedure is highly irregular, to say the least. Millard's slate isn't clean in this mess, by any means."

Millard said: "I was too busy helping to save May Fitz from a couple of dirty hoods to worry about that up to now."

Stendahl had advanced on Reid, his mean mouth twisted. And Reid shrank back, his eyes jumping about as though seeking some means of escape.

"Not me!" he whined. "You can't hang that killing on me! I was outside when Bonelli came down the slide."

"Who, Millard?" Hernandez asked.

"If I name him," Millard said, "do May and I get a clean slate?"

Hernandez hesitated a moment, his eyes still almost closed, then nodded slowly. "If you can tie him up?"

Millard turned and looked at Reid, said: "No, not you. "Then he glared at the tall lean-hipped man standing before the door. "Cosgrave . . ."

Abrupt silence clamped down on the room. Cosgrave stared back at Millard, then laughed. "You're nuts!"

King's good-looking face was bewildered. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "Cosgrave is an investigator for the Better Citizenship League.

Why would he kill anyone? You're crazy, Millard."

Millard didn't take his eyes off Cosgrave. "Maybe that job is just as front for his real business. He came here two years ago from San Francisco, and right after that Sunshine Beer began to be sold on draught here. He was at the Dragon Slide right after Bonelli came down the chute.

"He could have been up above when Bonelli got there, brained him with a pipe or whatever he used, thrown the pipe out into the ocean, gone down the ladder he pointed out, slipped around to the front in the crowd. He would never have walked in here now like this, if he'd known May Fitz was free and his two imported muscle-men had been gunned out."

Cosgrave was smiling and his smile showed hard white teeth. Hernandez had rocked forward in his chair, said slowly, emphatically:

"That's a serious charge, Millard. Have you got anything to back it up, outside of your second-guessing?"

MILLARD had no proof and he knew it. All he had was a dead certainty that he was right; he had to be, to get May in the clear. His face was dark, bitterly sullen. "Hell," he snarled, "two and two makes four, doesn't it? All you have to do is add it up and get the picture."

"You're having pipe dreams, Millard," Cosgrave said easily.

"That kind of picture isn't enough to get an indictment," King sniffed. "The case would be thrown out of court. You're stalling, Millard—trying to save yourself and the girl. But you can't do it. I'm going to hold you both."

May Fitz had come to sudden animated life, half-rising from her chair. She was staring at Cosgrave with horror-stricken realization. "Yes!" she breathed tensely. "Yes! It was Cosgrave! It has to be. He was the only other one besides Eddie that I told where and when I was going to

meet Bonelli. I'd forgotten about it—but it was before Eddie called.

"I told him because I—he seemed to be a friend of Eddie's in the old days, and I thought he might give me some protection. He'd come to see me; he wanted to get in touch with Eddie through me, he said. And I told him about Bonelli calling and wanting me to meet him."

"And that is very funny," Millard announced tightly. "Being that Cosgrave is an investigator for the Better Citizenship League. Why would he be friendly, secretly of course, with Eddie Fitz—head of the gambling syndicate that controlled the city?"

Cosgrave's lip curled. "All this is very interesting, but none of it is proof that I committed a murder. I'm not admitting any of it is true."

"You don't have to," Millard told him, getting his teeth in it, a triumphant tone behind the words. "When one of your hoods kicked off in that hideout of yours on the palisades, he named you in a dying confession. And I'm betting a check will show your prints all over that hideout."

It was a bluff, but it worked. Cosgrave's face almost went to pieces, stiffened in a white grimacing mask. He was rigid, his shoulders pressed back against the door. Before he could speak, Lefty Reid snarled shrilly:

"Sure! The dirty louse was selling Sunshine Beer in here. He kept trying to get to Bonelli, but Bonelli wouldn't see him. He'd sold out to the local breweries. So this rat knocked off my boss. Let me at 'im!"

Reid was lunging across the room, his weasel-face convulsed and a long nail file in his fist, held like a dagger.

"Look out!" Millard yelled and stuck out his foot. Reid tripped over it, dived headlong to the floor at Cosgrave's feet.

Cosgrave, taking advantage of the momentary distraction, had gone for his gun, clawing it out and reaching

for the door knob with his left hand.

Hernandez clipped out: "Drop it, you fool! You can't get out of here!"

Millard, snapping his automatic from its clip, was diving across the room to knock May Fitz out of the way of possible gunfire. He hit her and they both sprawled in the corner as a gun bellowed, shook the room with its concussion. Millard looked up to see Cosgrave, a very surprised expression on his face, fall straight forward across Lefty Reid.

Hernandez was standing up behind the desk with his service gun in his hand, but it was from Stendahl's gun that smoke leaked, swirling upward. Stendahl stared, his face sick and shocked, and he muttered shakily:

"Cripes, did I kill him?"

HERNANDEZ was around the desk, getting Cosgrave's gun and rolling him over off Reid who scrambled away. Blood was staining coat cloth over Cosgrave's right shoulder. Hernandez looked at the wound, at Cosgrave's lax face, said:

"The damn' fool! No, you didn't kill him. You broke his shoulder and he's passed out from the shock. But if we can't hang that killing on him now after what Millard's given us, I'll resign and go back to peddling tamales. His own actions amounted to a confession." Reporters were yelling outside and some one was hammering on the door. He lifted his voice sharply: "Stay out of here!"

King sat down weakly in a chair, wiped his brow, complained: "Will some one please tell me what this is all about?"

Millard was sitting on the floor with his arm around May who had let go in another crying spell. "I'll explain it once more," he said sweetly, feeling relieved and triumphant, "but I doubt if *you'll* understand.

"Cosgrave got his job with the Better Citizenship League as a front for his real activities. Undercover, he came here to promote the sale of Sunshine Beer, in kegs—no doubt on a

commission basis. Through a deal with Eddie Fitz, he lined up all the bars in town.

"The local breweries didn't like having an out-of-town beer coming in in kegs and cutting into their trade, but they couldn't do anything about it because the syndicate was running things. When Fitz was indicted and went to trial, Cosgrave still wasn't worried, because ostensibly he'd been working for the Better Citizenship League and the League had engineered the recall that put Mayor Peters in.

"He thought he was in a spot where he'd swing enough political power to insure his income, which must have amounted to plenty of shekels a month, without the help of Fitz and the need of cutting him in for a percentage. But the syndicate still swung a lot of weight, though driven to cover, and Bonelli had sold out to the local breweries.

"Cosgrave's big income was gone. And then he saw an opportunity to get rid of Bonelli and maybe save it. During the confusion that would follow in the organization—the syndicate was on its last legs anyhow—he would have the opportunity to put Sunshine Beer across again."

"Oh. . . ." King breathed, smiling

and nodding in a friendly way. "Oh. . . ."

"Don't smile at me, you hypocritical louse!" Millard snarled. "You're the guy who was going to get my license. Let's see you do it now. Boy, will I roast you when the newshounds interview me!"

He looked down at the top of May Fitz' head and his voice softened. "How do you feel, chicken?"

She nodded, her head against his shoulder. "I'm all right. Just hold me tight, Chris. Hold me tight."

He held her. "It's all over, hon. We'll be in the clear. And when this case is aired in the papers, it'll raise such a stink anyone with one of those petitions the mayor was worrying about will be afraid to show his face on the street. When it's all over we'll go away somewhere together, where we can be alone and get some peace and quiet."

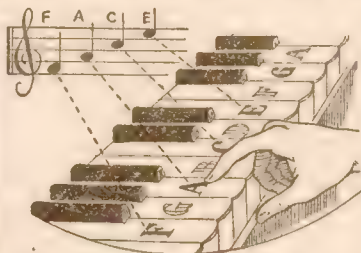
She looked up and a smile trembled on her lips. "Yes, Chris."

Hernandez and Stendahl were pulling Cosgrave's limp form away from before the door. Millard got a firm hold on May, grinned encouragingly down at her.

"Hold tight, honey," he said. "Now, the deluge, but it won't last long. Here come the newshounds."



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Private Detective Martin found himself in hot water when he plunged into the gambler's kidnap hideout. But a fast gun and a quick brain chilled that tureen of terror into cold consomme.

GETTING out of the taxi two blocks from his destination, Hoke Martin continued on foot. The street lights were few and far between here. Sinister shadows hung over the sidewalk.

Most of the residences sat far back. Except where lights were visible in the second stories of some of them, they were bleak bulks against the dark sky, screened by great oaks.

Hoke Martin deliberately chose the gloomiest side of the Lindsey estate for his entrance. He did not want to be seen. The chain-store magnate's only son had been kidnaped. The snatchers had warned Lindsey against calling in the police.

While Martin wasn't the police, he had an idea that private detectives might be equally distasteful to whoever had kidnaped young Lindsey.

So he proceeded cautiously.

Half a block ahead of him loomed the stone wall which bordered the Lindsey property. It was about four feet high. He saw that he could easily vault over it, drop to earth inside, and make his way through the trees and shrubbery to a side door which would admit him to the wealthy man's study.

Suddenly, without warning, Hoke Martin felt powerful arms grab him from behind. There had been no sound of a footstep, not even a remote sense of anyone's presence.

The red-haired detective was neither small nor weak. He was tall and sinewy, with long, well-trained arms, but at the first attempt to resist his attacker he felt the futility of it.

Great hands had forced themselves under his biceps, locked near the base of his neck. He was lifted bodily from the sidewalk and hauled, kicking and squirming, into a clump of bushes. He could not even see the giant who held him prisoner.

Those hands were like steel. Martin's arms were pinned against the barrel-like chest. He used his feet hard enough to have broken the shins of any lesser antagonist, but the giant did not appear to even notice the pounding heels.

And then one of the hands loosened, came out from under Hoke Martin's right arm. He half-whirled, flashing his bony fist upward. He was fast, but not fast enough.

The giant's right fist crashed against the base of his skull. Martin had never been knocked out by such a blow, delivered by a human fist, be-

fore. He would have sworn that no man could have put him out of commission that way.

But in a split moment of consciousness he knew that he was going under. Streaks of light shot across his vision, converged before his eyes, and exploded into a sheet of purple that brought oblivion.

When he recovered consciousness he was flat on the ground, on his belly. There was a peculiar strain in his limbs. He tried to blink and became aware that a cloth was tied tightly around his head, across his eyes. Trying to move, he felt rough circles of rope biting into his wrists and ankles.

He was spread-eagled on the ground.

How had the kidnapers known that he had been called in on the case? Guesses tumbled through his brain. Perhaps they hadn't known. Perhaps they had just been watching the estate and had spotted him approaching it.

There was no way for him to know where he was or how long he might be left in this position. They might have taken him miles away from the scene of the attack while he was unconscious.

Then the sixth sense that had failed him on the sidewalk asserted itself. Hoke Martin knew that some one stood over him. He heard nothing, but he knew that some one was there. He tried to mumble through a gag which he felt in and over his mouth.

The answer was hot breath—against his ear. Lips that whispered huskily. An unpleasant odor.

"Looking for trouble, weren't you? Wanting a fight? Well, you got one."

The whisper ceased. Martin tried to answer and found that he could make nothing but soft unintelligible noises.

"No use trying to talk," the low voice came again. "This is just a little lesson for you. Stay out of the Lindsey case. You get it? Stay out of the Lindsey case."

ABRUPTLY Hoke Martin felt those same giant hands on his spine again. This time they caught the neck of his coat and ripped it, tore it down his back. His shirt and undershirt were torn off his shoulders the same way.

Something swished through the air, cracked tentatively. Suddenly Martin realized what it was. A horsewhip. Then it cut the air and descended on his bare back. The lash of pain sent every muscle, every nerve in the detective's body tense.

The whip was raised and brought down again. The tip of it snaked over his side, even seemed to be reaching under him to add to the inches of pain.

How long the lashing continued Hoke Martin never knew. It seemed to be hours, but it might have been only a few minutes. The whisper did not come again—only the fury of the whip.

When it finally stopped he lay half dazed. Warm, moist blood trickled down his spine. He shook his head, and an involuntary movement disclosed that his hands and feet were free.

Slowly, painfully, he got on his hands and knees, turned, and got into a sitting position. His back was a lump of raw throbs. Loose ends of rough hemp rope dangled from his wrists and ankles.

In front of him and behind him he could see other rope ends tied to young trees. His bindings had been slashed cleanly with a sharp knife.

Groping in the half-darkness, he rose and started forward. Ahead, through a leafy tangle, he glimpsed a street light. His mind became clearer and he halted and got out a pocket knife and cut the rope ends from his hands and feet.

Three of them he threw away, but one he stuffed into a pocket. The dirty rags over his face he also kept. The one which had been used to blindfold him was over his nose. Evidently

the attacker had untied it and pushed it down before disappearing.

Martin came out on the sidewalk near the same spot at which the giant had grabbed him. The street was deserted.

Pushing what was left of his coat over his raw shoulders as best he could, the detective discovered that his revolver was still in his shoulder holster. He got out his wallet. No money had been taken.

A few minutes later he strode into a corner drug store, brushed past the gaping clerk and made his way to a phone booth. A taxi arrived quickly, and he went to a hospital and had his wounds dressed, then to his room for fresh clothing.

LESS than an hour from the time of the attack Hoke Martin was again getting out of a taxi two blocks from the Lindsey residence, but this time he approached it from a different angle.

Crossing a side street in the shadows, he made his way along beside the stone wall. Ahead of him, a gate stood open. Lindsey had told him to come this way, and Martin intended to do it, even if he had to blast out any other interference with hot lead.

Three feet from the gate, he halted abruptly.

A voice had come out of nowhere.

"Stay out, Hoke Martin. You had your warning. Next time we won't be so easy on you."

The detective reached for his gun, whirling. No one was behind him. No one was in sight anywhere.

Oddly detached, the voice continued. "Do you want to die? Enter that gate and it means death for you. You know we mean business." Then it stopped, as mysteriously as it had begun.

Grimly Martin looked about him. The voice had seemed to be no more than a few feet away, yet there was no possible place of concealment—except on the other side of the wall. In a flash the detective hoisted him-

self onto the bulwark. His keen eyes searched the yard. No one was there.

And then, as if to mock him, the voice came once more.

"Stay out."

The words had an unearthly quality. They did not seem to come from any definite direction, yet Martin felt that they had been uttered only a few feet away. He looked up. A towering maple tree reared its arms to the sky, but it was leafless and there was no place in its branches a man could hide.

Dropping back to the sidewalk, he stood for a moment trying to guess the answer to the riddle. No answer came. A voice—a human voice had simply come out of thin air.

Gripping his gun, Martin started toward the gate. If this was a challenge, he'd see it out.

He pulled up short once more as he glimpsed a figure which staggered out of the shadows and into the gate ahead of him. This man walked as if he were drunk. There was something about him which led Martin to believe he was a servant, returning from a night's revelry.

Quickly the detective followed.

As he reached the gate and turned in, he heard two crashing shots. Echoes clattered up and down in the blackness. Two livid streaks of flame split the night.

Martin tugged trigger, aiming at the flashes. Three times his gun roared. Then he plunged forward, toward the spot at which he had shot. A bush was in his path and he stumbled over it, regained his balance, and lunged on.

Moonlight drifted down through the trees and he saw that the space was clear. Only maple leaves littered the ground. There was no sign of any killer.

Barely halting at the spot, he ran on for fifty yards, but still there was no one to be seen.

Puzzled, Martin returned, and looked around on the ground. No visible trace remained of any assailant.

Grimly he set his teeth and wished for a flesh-and-blood target. This will-o'-the-wisp fighting in the darkness did not suit him.

The gunman, like the voice, had simply vanished.

With a shrug, the detective started back to the path which led to the side door of the house. Even before he saw that huddled form, the thought struck him that the killer, whoever he was, must have mistaken the servant for him.

The body lay in the middle of the path. It had pitched forward on its face. It was perfectly still, and in such an unnatural position that Hoke Martin sensed the man was dead.

He turned the limp form over on its back. Two holes gaped in the breast. The servant—if he was a servant, and closer inspection strengthened Martin's guess—was thin, with pale skin and a reddish nose.

Probably had been passing the evening in some drinking place, Martin guessed.

Keeping his gun in his right fist, the detective managed to lift the body by one arm and get it across a shoulder. It was difficult, keeping his gun hand free for instant shooting if necessary, but he made it.

Then, with the head and arms of the dead man dangling over his back and with the legs hanging in front of him, Martin strode up the path to the house. He made a curiously sinister figure in the ghostly moonlight. His hat was askew, and a shock of his red hair protruded.

A DIM light revealed a *porte cochère*. Hoke Martin stalked under it, up three steps, and onto a porch. Suddenly he halted, every nerve in his lithe frame on fire.

There, before the door, towering in his path, was a blond giant who pointed a gun. He was at least six and a half feet tall. His stolid face was broad and flat but his eyes gave it a certain cunning intelligence.

For a moment they faced each other

—Martin with his gruesome burden over his left shoulder and his right hand gripping a heavy revolver, and the giant simply standing with one arm loose and the other thrust forward, pointing the gun at Martin's midriff.

"Who are you?" the giant finally growled. His weapon did not waver.

"I was called here by Nelson Lindsey," Martin replied. "And who are you?"

The chain-store magnate himself stepped forward from behind the giant.

"This is Eric, one of my servants," Lindsey said. And, catching sight of Martin's burden, "Gad! What is that you are carrying?"

For answer the detective stepped forward, around the giant, who still covered him with the gun, and in the doorway. Lindsey and the giant followed.

"In that room to the right," Lindsey directed.

Martin went on into the room without looking back. It was the chain-store magnate's study. He stopped in the center of the thick rug and unceremoniously dumped his burden to the floor.

"My butler!" Lindsey gasped, entering ahead of the giant. "Is he— has he been shot?"

Martin nodded. "Murdered!"

Eric looked on expressionlessly. Not a muscle in his big face moved.

Staring with wide eyes at the body on the floor, Lindsey swallowed with an effort. "Who—"

"I don't know," Martin said. "But whoever killed him got him by mistake. They meant to get me." Swiftly he related his experiences of the evening, but glossed over his impressions of the attacker who had horsewhipped him.

"The kidnapers!" Lindsey exclaimed.

"It looks that way," Martin agreed, and jerked his head toward Eric. "By the way, what was this fellow doing

standing there on the porch with a gun when I arrived?"

"When I heard the shots, I called him," Lindsey explained. "I told him to go out and see what was the matter. It might have been back-fires from some car on the street, you see. I wasn't sure. He was on his way to investigate when you appeared."

Martin's eyes narrowed, but he did not comment further. He was looking at the giant's trousers. A strand of something was caught in one of the cuffs.

"Call the police," he said, and transferred his gaze to the body on the floor.

"We can't do that!" Lindsey moaned. "My son! The kidnapers! They will think— They'll kill my son!"

"No," said Martin. "They won't do that. They know about the murder of the butler. They know you have to call the police." He was standing near Eric now, wiping his hands with a handkerchief. "You can stall them off for a while. You don't have to say anything about the kidnaping."

"All right," Lindsey said after a moment. "I'll do it." He moved across the room and picked up a telephone from a desk. Eric's stolid eyes followed him.

HOKE MARTIN'S handkerchief dropped and he stooped to pick it up. As he straightened, an imperceptible flick of the wrist gave him the wisp of hemp he had seen in Eric's trouser cuff. He wiped his hands again carelessly, and the little strand went into his pocket with the handkerchief.

"Nelson Lindsey speaking," the gray-haired man said into the phone. "My butler has been shot to death . . . What? . . . Yes." He pronged the receiver and turned to Martin. "They're coming."

"Good enough," the detective said. "Now we've got to talk fast. I've got to get out of here before the police

arrive. Have you had any further word from the kidnapers?"

"Yes," said Lindsey, and produced a yellow envelope. "This came half an hour ago. It was delivered by a regular messenger. I called the telegraph company and they said they didn't know who sent it. It was found on the counter with a dollar bill."

Martin took the envelope, slid a finger under the flap, and unfolded the message. It was brief. Just the address, and:

PHONE AMSTERDAM 2368 ONE TONIGHT

It was not signed. Hoke Martin memorized the number and handed the message back to Lindsey.

"That's something to work on, anyhow," he said. "Give me a few hours and I may find your son."

"You think—"

"Yes, I think I'll have him, or know where he is, before dawn. But before I go, I want to ask you a few questions."

"Sure. Anything." Lindsey was eager.

"Has your son been in any trouble lately?" the detective inquired huskily. "Say, over a woman, or anything like that?"

"No-o," Lindsey answered hesitantly.

"What does he do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. Does he work?"

"He has a position with a radio broadcasting company as a sort of technical assistant, but it doesn't take up much of his time. He spends most of his time here at the house. There is a laboratory here which he uses for experiments." Lindsey passed a hand nervously over his forehead.

"Where is this laboratory?"

"It's right under this room, in the basement. Do you want to see it?"

"No. Is your son engaged to be married?"

"Engaged? Er—no. He goes out with girls now and then, but not with any particular one."

"Good enough," Martin said, gazing

speculatively at the body on the floor. "I'm leaving. When the police arrive, stall them off. Tell them you don't have any idea how your butler could have been shot. It's a risk—withholding information—and you'll have to do it on your own responsibility. You'll—"

"That's all right," Lindsey agreed quickly. "I'll do it. Anything to save my son."

Giving a final glance to the body on the floor, Hoke Martin pushed back a shock of his red hair, donned his hat, and went out.

As he hurried down the pathway to the side street, he saw the headlights of the police car coming up the driveway.

A CHECK-UP of the telephone number proved that it was a pay booth in an all-night drug store on Hampton Drive. Hoke Martin parked his battered but speedy coupé in front and went in.

The only attendant in the store was a thin, sallow man who wore a green eye shade and no coat. His sleeves were rolled half up to his elbows and his vest was unbuttoned.

Martin strolled up to the counter, glancing at a clock on the wall. It was 12:30.

"What can I do for you?" the clerk said.

The way Martin doped it, there were two possibilities. Either the kidnapers would call this store a few minutes before one o'clock and leave another number for the clerk to give to the person who called at one, or they had already provided the second number.

If the scheme was to call a minute or two before one, then the detective figured he was out of luck. But if the clerk was already in on it to a certain degree, it might be possible to get the number from him.

"Somebody is going to call this store at exactly one o'clock," Martin said as an opener.

The clerk frowned with one corner

of his mouth, wrinkled his brows. "What of it?" he wanted to know.

"Something's gone wrong," Martin said. "It didn't work out the way we thought it would. So the guy that gave you the number to tell them to call has changed his plans. I've got to call that second number now. He told me what it was, but I've forgotten it. Thought I'd drop in here and get it from you."

The clerk waved a hand. "Beat it, bozo. You're screwy. I don't know what you're talking about."

"But—"

"Scram! I'll call a cop!" And the clerk moved toward the phone booth.

One of Martin's hands went into a pocket and came out with a bill. The clerk, looking back, saw it and stopped. For a moment he stood there, motionless. Then he turned and came back, close enough to see the denomination of the money.

It was a thousand-dollar bill. Lindsey's money.

The clerk's gimlet eyes bored at Hoke Martin. He seemed to be deliberating. Abruptly he shrugged, reached for the bill, and said, "Chatham 6936."

"Thanks," Martin said, and let him have the bill.

"Don't mention it," the clerk returned. "I'd kill a guy for that much money."

Grinning, Martin pivoted and went out to the street. The snatchers were pretty slick, he told himself as he climbed into the coupé. A dumb dick who didn't know the business would simply have had this drug store watched, and nothing would have happened. The clerk would have answered the phone at once, given the second number, and Lindsey would have called the kidnapers there. It was a slick scheme, all right. The only trouble with it was that it wasn't slick enough.

THE trail led him to the worst section of the city. Helltown, it was called. From a dark alley across the

dingy street Hoke Martin watched the lighted windows and the doorway of the greasy little café.

It was five minutes until one. A biting wind whipped up the alley. Without a topcoat, Martin shivered, glancing at the luminous dial of his wristwatch.

As near as he could make out, there were only two persons in the café—a Negro who was mopping the floor and a dark-haired man in greasy clothes who was cooking hamburgers. Neither of them would be the one who would answer the phone.

Three minutes until one. Still the street was empty. Martin's right hand rested on the butt of his revolver in his coat pocket. He had removed it from his shoulder holster to be ready for instant action.

One o'clock. The wind whistled eerily, caught up a piece of newspaper in the gutter, blew it along jerkily, and slammed it against a lamp-post.

Martin's fingers tightened on his gun as he saw a man come from around a corner and hurry toward the café. As he recognized the man, the detective exhaled slowly—not because there was any lessening of the sense of danger, but because he knew he had doped it right.

The man was Steve Durga. "Slick Steve," he was called. Gambler, confidence man, one-time racketeer—all-around king-pin in the underworld. He would be just the kind to engineer the kidnaping of Nelson Lindsey's son.

Durga was in the café about three minutes. He came out walking jauntily, like a man completely satisfied with the way his affairs were going. Nothing furtive about Slick Steve Durga. Tailing him expertly for half a dozen blocks, Hoke Martin frowned as he saw the gambler turn into Tieless Tony's. Tieless Tony, so-called because he never wore a necktie, was a front. The eating and drinking resort which he operated was a screen for the gambling den upstairs run by Durga.

It was a gathering-place for the

city's worst criminal element. Whispers went around that men had been shot to death in Tieless Tony's when the place was crowded, yet the police had never been able to find a witness who would testify.

Backwash of depravity as it was, careless rich patronized the gambling joint of Durga, mainly because it gave them a thrill. Hoke Martin never doubted but that young Lindsey might be held prisoner somewhere in that building.

Squaring his shoulders, he crossed the street and rapped on the door. A panel in the portal slid back. A leering face, whose sunken jaws denoted toothlessness, peered out at him.

"Getting particular these days?" Martin asked.

The toothless one looked worried for an instant. Martin got the impression that he was pushing a button.

"That's all right," the detective said. "Let 'em know I'm coming. I don't mind. But open up."

Grinning sheepishly now, the toothless man closed the panel and opened the door.

With his right hand in his coat pocket, nestling the gun there, Martin walked in.

Down a short corridor he strode, ahead of the lookout, and paused in the entryway to the main downstairs room. The glances which were cast in his direction seemed casual enough, but Martin caught an undercurrent of tenseness.

The chances were that a majority of the nearly two dozen men in that room were armed. They were wary-eyed and subtly insolent. And the women with them, Martin knew, could be just as deadly when they chose to be.

Looking neither to the right nor to the left, the detective strode to the bar and confronted Tieless Tony.

"Old-fashioned," he ordered.

Tieless Tony smiled doubtfully. "H'lo, Martin." His collar was open and thick black hair showed on his

chest. He produced the drink and set it on the bar.

"I want to see Durga," Martin said, taking a swallow.

"Durga?"

"You heard me, Tony. Don't get funny. Slick Steve Durga. Send somebody for him, or ring a bell, or whatever you do. But get him. Now."

"Okay, Martin," Tony said in a peeved voice. "Okay. No use to be so nasty about it. I'll get him." And he called over a waiter and sent him for the gambler.

The detective turned around, lit a cigarette, and hooked his elbows on the bar. His eyes, squinted behind the smoke that drifted up from the cigarette, roved the room as he waited. Many of the men here he knew by reputation. A few were small-timers, hangers-on, but most of them were exactly what they seemed to be. They were killers.

"Kind of you to call, Martin!"

Slowly the detective turned his head. His right hand still nestled in his coat pocket, and he made no attempt to conceal the bulge.

SLICK STEVE DURGA stood not four yards away. The gambler's eyes were cold and remorseless. His nose was thin, a little hooked. His mouth was like a bloodless slit in a piece of shark's flesh.

"Hello, Durga."

The gambler came forward, confident and apparently fearless in the company of his henchmen. "Something you wanted, Martin?"

An ominous quiet reigned in the big room. All conversation at the tables had ceased. All eyes were turned in their direction.

"Sure," Martin agreed, in a tone loud enough for all to hear. "I want something. Or somebody. I came here to get Nelson Lindsey's son."

The silence grew more tense. Behind the bar, Tieless Tony's breathing came in short audible hisses.

"Young Frank Lindsey?" Durga asked, raising his eyebrows.

"That's the name, I believe," Martin confirmed.

"But he's not here," the gambler said easily. "The fact is, I hear he's been kidnaped."

"Sure," said Martin. "You kidnaped him. I came here to get him."

"Mind your talk!" Durga flared. "I don't know anything about Frank Lindsey."

The bulge in Martin's coat pocket changed shape slowly. Something round and hard poked out the cloth in front.

"Suppose we go up to your office and talk it over," the detective suggested.

Durga shrugged. "Why not? If you feel that way about it." He turned on one heel and walked toward a stairway that led up beside the wall. At the newel post he halted, waited for Martin to go first.

Martin was halfway up the stairs when Nelson Lindsey's son burst into view at the top. His clothes were awry and there were welts on his face.

"Get back, you damn—" Durga snarled.

Back to the wall, Martin flashed out his gun and leveled it at the gambler's chest.

"Careful, Durga!" he said slowly. "My trigger is pulled all the way back on this rod. Nothing is holding the hammer but my thumb. If anything should happen to me and my thumb should let the hammer go, you'd get a dose of lead!"

"I can't go through with it!" Frank Lindsey was saying from the top of the stairs. "To hell with you and your crooked gambling games!"

Durga's lips curled wolfishly. "Just the hammer holding it back, eh, Martin? When the hammer is turned loose, out comes the bullet, eh?"

"That's right."

"I'll take my chances!" the gambler clipped. And, still looking steadily at the gaping muzzle of Martin's revolver, he spoke to the men behind him in the room, "Give it to 'em, boys! Both of 'em!" His body was taut as

he prepared to throw himself to one side to escape Martin's bullet.

The detective's left hand had been hovering near a vest pocket. Now it flashed up threateningly; he held a small bottle high enough for all to see.

"Soup!" he yelled.

That word, cracked out in a different kind of gathering, might have been funny. But it was not funny in Tieless Tony's hangout. Soup, to these killers, was occasionally something to eat, but more often it was a high explosive—nitroglycerine.

"One shot and I throw this bottle!" Martin shouted. "Just dropping it would probably be enough. It would blow every mother's son of you to hell!"

He held the bottle with its grayish fluid poised high. Not a man stirred. Then he spoke without looking up.

"Come on down the stairs and get out of here, Lindsey!"

The young man came softly past him, stopped briefly beside Slick Steve Durga, started to say something, thought better of it, and went on.

Slowly he walked between the bar and the tables where Durga's henchmen sat. He was halfway to the front when Nelson Lindsey and the giant, Eric, appeared in the entryway.

The magnate and his big servant gazed wide-eyed at the scene.

"There's your son, Mr. Lindsey," Martin said from the stairs. "Get him out of here quick and call the cops!"

"You don't have to call the cops," said a voice from behind Nelson Lindsey, as a headquarters detective stepped into view, followed by half a dozen more. "We're already here."

HALF an hour later, at the police station, the inspector was explaining his timely appearance.

"After we investigated the murder of the butler and left Lindsey's house," he said, "I had a feeling that something was wrong. You had been pret-

ty evasive in your answers to my questions, Mr. Lindsey."

The chain-store magnate nodded.

"So I placed three men about your estate with orders to watch it," the inspector went on. "When you and Eric, here—" he jerked his head toward the giant, who stood near by, handcuffed—"came out, my men notified me and we followed you."

"I had been in touch with the kidnapers, then, you see," the elder Lindsey explained. "They sent me a telegram and told me to call a certain number. I called that at one o'clock, as I had been told to do, and a man who answered told me to call another number."

Hoke Martin smiled but said nothing.

"Whoever it was that answered at this second number," Lindsey continued, "told me he didn't want cash. Afraid of the numbers on the bills, I suppose. He told me he wanted my wife's diamond necklace."

"Whew!" the inspector said. "That thing's worth a hundred thousand dollars, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Lindsey. "Durga probably could have gotten fifty thousand for it, disposing of it through a fence. He told me to bring it to Tieless Tony's place at once and my son would be freed. So Eric and I started out, not knowing, of course, that you were following us."

"And you didn't suspect, then, that your son was in on his own kidnapping?" the inspector asked.

"No," said Nelson Lindsey, "and I don't see yet how Martin figured it out. How did you do it, Martin?"

"The main clue was what you said about your son's penchant for radio," the private detective said. "On my way to your estate, on the edge of it, in fact, I was mystified by a voice that seemed to come to me from out of nowhere.

"So after I had talked with you, I did some investigating. I found a loudspeaker concealed in the stone wall. A

wire connected it to your son's laboratory.

"I already knew Eric was in on it, because of a piece of hemp I found in his trouser cuff. It was a strand from the rope that had been used to tie me when I was horsewhipped. After that, it was easy to see how Eric could have used his voice through the loudspeaker, slipped out a basement window, and be in time to shoot the butler when the butler came up the driveway.

"It was pretty dark and Eric thought the butler was me."

"God! What a mess!" young Frank Lindsey moaned. "I feel as guilty of murder as if I had shot that butler myself."

"No!" Eric spoke up. "You told me not to shoot. Just to scare. Not your fault."

"You see," young Lindsey went on, "I had lost a lot of money in Durga's gambling den and there was no way for me to pay him. I went to my father but he wouldn't let me have the money. Durga argued me into this kidnaping idea. Said my father would never know the difference."

Hoke Martin smiled grimly. "But you lost your nerve when you heard me downstairs in Tieless Tony's, saying I had come for you. You came to the stairs, and that's when it started."

Young Lindsey nodded.

"There was one narrow escape that even you don't know about, though. Tieless Tony was snaking a gun up to shoot you when the police came in. I was about to shout at you."

The private detective grinned.

"Sure, I knew about that." He looked at Tony, who stood handcuffed next to Eric.

"Nitroglycerine is usually yellow," Tony said. "Like I told Martin on the way down here. That stuff he had in the bottle was grayish." He seemed proud of his knowledge.

"What was that stuff you had in the bottle, then?" Nelson Lindsey asked.

"Soup," said Martin. "Just plain chicken soup."

When Private Detective Hammond jumped on the corpse trail he became a

Homicide Demon

By Harold F. Sorensen

Author of "Headstone Payoff," etc.



HIS tottering client gasped and grunted into the office, shooting sharp glances ahead with twinkling little eyes. Hammond sprang up to help and then realized it would be resented. So he just gave a trifling turn to the chair beside the desk, and the old man sat.

"Want you to work for me, Hammond." It sounded like a reprimand, and he twitched his lips, looking about as if for somewhere to spit. "Heard about you, read about you," he grunted as if compliments were not his usual line. "You're a good investigator, and you're honest."

Hammond laced fingers and assured him the job would be a pleasure. "Hmm. I'm Oliver Mowat." He

put a twenty and two tens on the desk. "You come out to my house this evening, Hammond. Seventy-seven Beech Street, eight o'clock." Mowat prepared to rise.

He was bald with only a fringe of stringy, coarse gray hair, and even that was fading about the temples, revealing fine blue veins. From the beaky, humped nose up over the bald head, his face was bony. His eyes were too big, and age was creeping into them. Paper-thin, his pale skin was taut over his nose, cheekbones and forehead, loose about his mouth and chin, disproportionately small features for his face. He lifted his black hat off his lap and set it on his head.

"Why not tell me everything now, Mr. Mowat?"

"No, no, spoil everything." Mowat shook his head and appeared again to be chewing tobacco and wanting to spit. "Think maybe 'twas enough t'come here, Hammond. My visit don't settle everything—I'll tell you all there is this evening."

Hammond blocked his rise from the chair.

"Mr. Mowat, you came here thinking you'll scare some one. That's dangerous. A frightened man can jump two ways—one of them lands him knee-deep in murder."

Mowat's mouth shaped up: he was smiling.

"Ain't afraid." He struggled to his feet. "You see me this evening, Hammond."

"But I feel responsible for you," Hammond blurted.

Mowat twisted a finger in his ear, murmured: "Much obliged, Hammond. Good day."

Hammond kicked the chair as the door closed. What could you do with an old guy like that?

He grabbed his hat, got to the street floor as Mowat tottered out into the sunshine. He hurried after him, bumped into a man and cleared him aside with a sweep of his arm, keeping his eyes on Mowat going toward the cab file.

"I want to talk to you, Hammond." The man he'd bumped caught his arm.

Hammond jerked his arm, the movement jolting the younger man, tilting his hat back and revealing chestnut hair, lifting the shadow of the brim from a young, clean-cut and shaven face.

"I'm busy, Sharon," Hammond clipped, his broad dark face angry.

ONE night, in desperate straits, Hammond had joined in a big-time crap game. Before he got the dice, he lost his last ten spot. Without a word Dave Sharon had surreptitiously slipped him a twenty. He'd rolled it into four grand. He was plenty grateful for that; he'd had thirty dollars in the world, and there were hospitalization and recuperative bills to pay for a dick who had been shot up while working for him. He had returned the favor to Sharon, often.

The kid had a slight physique, but he wouldn't leave the bottle alone, though two drinks were all he needed to make him pick a fight with the biggest pug he could find. That Sharon still had a handsome face was entirely due to Hammond's frequent, timely intervention.

"Will you relax?" Sharon got hold again. "Mowat came to see you, huh? Then take it easy. Nothing is going to happen to him while I'm with you."

"You'd better explain that."

"Man, you're hot, calm down," Sharon argued. "Look. Mowat is my uncle."

There was a large man standing at Sharon's elbow. Hammond swerved his eyes and had just time to note the number of Mowat's cab before it was swallowed up in traffic.

"You knew your uncle was coming to me?"

"Oh, he's always talking and reading about you," Sharon answered impatiently, "and asking me about you. And I told Agnew I thought we'd better keep an eye on him." Sharon turned to the tall, strong-bodied man.

"George Agnew, Warren Hammond."

Agnew's handshake possessed quiescent power. Politely inquisitive gray eyes suggested that Agnew minded his own business with the vigilance of a jealous husband. His clothes were the best, his linen the freshest, his grooming perfect.

"We can't talk here," Sharon objected.

The human streams moving in and out of the building were surging and eddying about them, sluggish in an effort to get an earful. Hammond invited Sharon and Agnew upstairs.

Agnew took a chair, crossing his gray-trousered legs. Smoothing his gray-flecked black hair, he lit a cigar and as much as withdrew from the meeting.

"Sit down, Hammond," Sharon insisted, waiting to see it done before he sat himself. "My uncle Mowat has some money, and no one but me to leave it to. How was I to know he'd be so touchy about it?" He flung up his hands. "Agnew and I wanted to go in on a deal. Was there anything more logical than that I should ask Uncle Mowat for money?"

Sharon shifted on the chair in dudgeon. "He's acted strange ever since. I believe he thinks I'll murder him to get his money. His coming to you is the same as telling me he knows what I'm up to."

"What sort of deal is it?" He watched Agnew.

"That's none of your business, Hammond," Agnew informed him bluntly. "I'm not asking you to put money into it. Actually, I'm oversubscribed. I promised Sharon till tomorrow morning to let him in. But I wish he'd forget it."

"Oh, I guess I'll have to forget it."

Agnew slapped his knee and got up. "You're releasing me from my promise, Sharon."

Dave Sharon jerked petulantly. "It won't hurt you to wait till tomorrow, Agnew," he growled aggrievedly. "This means very much to me, Hammond. There's a girl. We want to

marry. I need money. It's her parents. She has so much, I'm broke—they think. . . . Hammond, do you understand what this chance to get rich means to me?"

Agnew grimaced, lifted his heavy brows, and glanced at Hammond as though they were sharing the boredom of a tiresome joke. "Your uncle knows we're friendly, yet he comes to me when he thinks you're planning his murder."

Sharon's fair face clouded. He could not reply, but he had the air of a man who knew the answer, if it would but come to mind.

Agnew rolled the cigar in his mouth, asked, "Is there any chance of making a deal with you?"

HAMMOND sprang up, clenching his fists. Agnew watched with unconcern. Hammond got the idea. Agnew was implying that Mowat had come because of a conviction that Hammond valued integrity above friendship. He sat down.

"There you are," Agnew shrugged. "Mowat came for a look at you, and my guess is that he told you little. If Mowat wanted just a detective, he could easily have obtained one. But, naturally he's fond of Sharon, and figures that you'll talk Sharon out of any wild ideas Sharon has."

It was plausible.

Agnew got up. Sharon rose and moved after him.

"I think it's decent of Uncle Mowat not to tell you that he suspected me, Hammond. I'm not thinking of murdering him." Dave Sharon returned to the desk. "If I were, I certainly would now, because no one would believe I'd done it after I know Uncle Mowat suspects and has a detective watching me."

"Don't talk like that."

"If Sharon came to me with money," Agnew chimed in, "and one dollar of it was dirty, I'd have nothing to do with him."

"I know that," Sharon whirled. "Don't worry, if I get any money, it

will be clean. Why shouldn't Uncle Mowat give it to me? He was always saying how sorry he was that he couldn't leave me as well off as he wanted to. Lots of times he's tried to figure out how he could make more money. Then I get the chance—and what does he do?"

"Glad to have met you," Agnew waved to Hammond.

"Sure."

"I'm glad you didn't get the wrong idea about me," Sharon sighed. "I'll tell Uncle Mowat I talked to you. Bet he hangs his head when I tell him he thought I was going to kill him."

"Time the happy understanding for this evening," Hammond remarked. "I'll be along to see it."

Sharon's jaw dropped. "You keep-
ing on with this case?"

"I promised your uncle I'd come see him this evening."

"All right." Sharon followed Agnew to the door. Agnew nodded good-bye, and they left, without any leave-taking on Sharon's part.

Hammond got a cigar from the desk drawer, elevated his feet and sat back.

Mowat no doubt feared that if he surrendered his money, he would see no more of Sharon, and for an old man with one relative, that would be a blow. He sympathized with Sharon, but he could also see that an old man like Mowat would not want to lose his hold on the one person on whom he had a claim.

He walked about the office, back and forth in his own cigar smoke. There was a warning in the fact that Dave Sharon would not accept defeat. Agnew apparently didn't care one way or the other. But Dave Sharon was sullenly resolute.

THE private detective left the office, and went downstairs. There were three cabs at the curb. Holding a folded bill loosely in his fingers, he thrust it towards the cabbie who had driven Mowat away. The man glanced at the money, then at him, startled.

"Remember picking up an old man?"

"Say," the cabbie brightened, "ain't you Hammond?"

"Uh, huh."

"Gee, it must be great to be a dick, even a private one," the cabbie exclaimed ingenuously.

"Uh, huh." He smiled, closed his eyes momentarily at the unintended insult. "But you're always asking for information. And the people who have it hate to give. A dentist has it easier."

"I get it." The cabbie took the bill. "I rode the old guy to Seventy-seven Beech Street. Say, Hammond, anything exciting?"

"No," he expelled it bluffly. "I was concerned about the old fellow getting home, that's all. I thought he'd stop off on the way."

"Only at the post office."

"What'd he do, mail a letter? You did? For him? Did you see the address?"

The cabbie shook his head.

"It was kinda heavy, and he asked me to drop it in the slot for him. I went in, but I saw he had his eye on me all the time, so I just dropped it." He wagged a finger. "But I know it went special delivery, because he made me go in and get the special stamp and a big envelope first."

"Thanks, hope we can get together some time."

He started away from the cab. It's a poor detective that scorns his own advice. He'd warned Mowat only an hour ago that it was dangerous to go to a detective, simply to scare some one. Mowat had not exactly scared Sharon, but. . .

He spun on his heel and ran back to the cab.

"Seventy-seven Beech Street."

"You make your mind up fast, don't you?" the cabbie clucked with his tongue as he worked the cab out of line.

Hammond ran up the steps to the house door and rang the bell furiously. The door opened, and Agnew stood

in it, his broad face red, his eyes goggling.

"Hammond! I thought it was the doctor."

He grabbed Agnew's coat front.

"Mowat," Agnew gasped. "He passed away."

Hammond flung Agnew aside and ran into the house. The first open door he saw he ran in.

Dave Sharon was in the room. Everything was pulled out of a small safe and thrown about. Sharon was rummaging in a desk. He turned, his face deadly white, his eyes staring starkly.

"Oh!" Sharon cried.

Hammond shook Sharon. Sharon's eyes became smaller, less glazed, light came into them.

"Hammond! His money! He—there's nothing. He left nothing!"

Hammond pushed Sharon away with a fierce force that sent him across the room, half-turning, getting twisted in his own feet and stumbling.

"You little rat! Where is your uncle?"

"In his bed, upstairs. Agnew helped me carry him up."

He ran upstairs and found the room just as Sharon and Agnew came up with the doctor. He gestured the doctor in, hustled Sharon and Agnew into the hall, ordering: "Doc, I want a thorough examination. You have the least qualms about it, you order an autopsy. Because if you don't, I will."

The doctor gave him a haughty, outraged stare and went to the bed.

Agnew and Sharon were in the hall, Agnew chewing on half a cigar.

"Listen, Agnew, and you too, Sharon. That doctor better think Mowat died naturally. Because if he doesn't, I'll walk barefoot through hell to send both of you to the chair."

"What's the matter with you, Hammond," Agnew sneered, "the old man get under your skin? Anyone would think he was your uncle. I had nothing to murder him for. I'm thoroughly sick of this business. Sharon, I'm through."

"Never mind that. How did Mowat die?"

"Hammond," Sharon burst out, "you must think I—"

"I asked you a question."

SHARON gulped. The chalky paleness of his face had dimmed to a waxen pallor. His cheeks were sunken. "I made Agnew come here because I wanted to try just once more to get the money. Uncle Mowat and I talked in his library. I told him I knew he'd hired you because he thought I was going to kill him. He said I was crazy."

"Go on."

"Agnew burst into the library and said from the way I was shouting at Uncle Mowat, he was afraid I had really lost my head. Agnew suggested that I leave uncle alone. I left Agnew and uncle talking, I was too disgusted to care about anything. I had a couple of drinks. Agnew came running out, shouting for me to get our doctor. But uncle Mowat was dead."

"Had a stroke right in front of me, poor old fellow!" Agnew sighed. "Too bad!"

"You bet it is. And what's this wrinkle you're adding about your uncle dying broke?"

"The safe is empty. His books show that he drew everything. He got rid of fifty thousand in the past week."

"He may have put it into a different bank—or in a safety deposit box."

Sharon was rigid and cross-eyed with excitement, he stirred himself and plunged down the stairs.

The doctor came out into the hall, bag in hand.

"Well, it was to be expected. He had a stroke. Whoever you are," he looked Hammond in the eye, "you can take that as the last word. Oliver Mowat had a very bad heart. He was anæmic and he was old. Because of your unfounded suspicions, I had a thorough look at him. He suffered no violence, and he was not poisoned; I shall issue a death certificate."

The doctor ended with a curt nod and went downstairs.

The doctor's and Sharon's voices floated up to him and Agnew, the doctor sympathizing and speaking of the funeral, Sharon mumbling indistinctly.

Sharon came up, and Agnew offered his hand.

"I want to offer my condolences, Sharon. Believe me, I feel this. I'm sorry you can't become my partner, for I've come to like you. Still, it's better that there is no money."

"There, there," Agnew put an arm about him, "it will turn up, Sharon. He was afraid you would kill him for his money. He put the money where you couldn't find it, so you would hesitate to take his life. Don't you see? And he died before he could reveal his secret."

Hammond turned away and went into the bedroom. The doctor had drawn the sheet up over Mowat's face.

Standing beside the bed, Hammond wished he had known Mowat a lot



Agnew glanced at Hammond. "I think you ought not to make things harder for this boy with a lot of idiotic suspicions. Mowat is dead. No one can do anything about that. It is extremely unfortunate that it happened when Sharon wanted money so badly. However, you can't make anything of that. I was with Mowat when he died. Sharon was in another room."

"The money gone, Sharon?"

"Yeah, Hammond." Sharon nodded like a man for whom the world is empty. "I called his banker and his lawyer. They both say uncle drew his money a week ago, in spite of their efforts to stop him or get him to tell them what he wanted the money for. I guess it serves me right." Sharon began to cry. "I just about wished him dead. And now he is, now he is."

better. Agnew's sneer that Mowat might have been *his* uncle, had some foundation. Only, he felt more as if Mowat had been his friend. It was remarkable how strongly he'd taken to the old fellow in their brief interview.

He uncovered the body.

The doctor had drawn Mowat's white shirt together without buttoning it, leaving exposed some of Mowat's thin, wiry-haired chest. The old man's face was the color of an over-ripe tomato, even purplish in parts. The upper, bony portion might have been cut from lapis lazuli. Even the bald top of his head was suffused.

A GOLD chain twined about a loop of Mowat's blue trousers and disappeared into a pocket. Farther down, the cuffs were twisted, as were

TSD

the socks. He pulled the trousers up, the socks down.

Mowat's ankles were bruised and discolored. His gaze rested thoughtfully on Mowat's gnarled hands.

A heap of wooden matches stood on the dresser, some toothpicks intermixed. He took one of the picks and cleaned under a nail on each of Mowat's dead hands. Grimacing at the white, dry stuff, he looked at the red deep in under the nails, dried, crusty.

He whirled at a touch, faced Sharon.

"Hammond, I can't stand you thinking of me as you do."

"Exactly what is this marvelous scheme of Agnew's?"

"It's a manufacturing process for steel, much cheaper—"

Agnew burst into the room. "Just what are you getting at? I'm confoundedly tired of your play-acting, Hammond." Agnew caught hold of Sharon and yanked him round. "I've trusted you with some valuable secrets, Sharon. See that you keep your mouth shut." An ugly expression gave the order emphasis.

"Just a moment, Agnew." Hammond thrust Sharon aside and faced Agnew. "Did you discuss this business Sharon wanted to go in on, with Mowat?"

"Go to hell!" Agnew roared. "I'm leaving here, but if I hear of you meddling in my affairs, I'll be back, Hammond."

"How about it, Sharon? You think Agnew tried to interest your uncle in this scheme?"

"They did have a lot of conferences, but I thought Agnew was trying to convince uncle to let me have the money."

"Conferences be damned!" Agnew exploded. "Chats! That's all, chats."

Hammond struck Agnew a swift blow in the chest, and as Agnew stumbled back, knocked him into a chair and grabbed up Agnew's ankles.

"What are you doing?" Agnew screamed, kicking.

Hammond ripped Agnew's socks.

"Look at those scratches. Sharon, phone the police."

"But I don't understand." Sharon stared.

"Damn your stupid head, who asked you to? Phone."

Sharon weaved towards the door.

"Stop!" Agnew had a gun pointed at Hammond's heart.

Sharon stopped, a cry in his throat.

"You got orders from me," Hammond barked. "Go out that door and phone the police. Agnew killed your uncle. You may kill me"—he gripped Agnew's ankle—"but you'll never be fast enough to keep him from getting the police. You're done, Agnew."

"Like hell! Let him move, I'll show you how fast I can be. He can't prove anything. And neither can you."

"Don't you believe it. Mowat put his money into your scheme, thinking to quadruple it and surprise Sharon with a big inheritance. You're just a rotten, dirty swindler, Agnew. You took Mowat's money. He got the idea you were swindling him, and he came to me. I believe Mowat gave you till this evening to return his money, and to show he wasn't fooling, he hired me. I still doubt that Mowat would have hired a friend of Sharon's if he thought Sharon wanted to kill him. It's you, Agnew."

"Hammond," Sharon cried, "maybe he did swindle uncle. But he couldn't have killed him. Uncle Mowat died."

"Maybe! Huh! He swindled your uncle all right, and probably he's swindled a lot of others who'll be only too glad to come forward and testify to what they know about Agnew."

"ALL right, you've got me," Agnew howled. "You're talking murder to scare me into confessing the swindle. I admit it. I can't stand to be exposed. But if you'll let me get out of town, I'll refund Mowat's money. How about it, Hammond?"

"What you need now, Agnew, is a friend, and murder's a poor provider. Sharon, I told you go get the cops.

Agnew killed your uncle by holding the old man upside down. A man in your uncle's condition couldn't stand much of that. Weak heart, anæmia, a few minutes of it would kill him, and there's no doctor could tell that death from a stroke or fit of apoplexy. Sharon, get out that door. Agnew can't get more than one of us."

"It'll be you I do get, you, Hammond. I'll shoot you through the heart, and enjoy it. No one can prove what you're saying. I warn you, Sharon, this man is crazy."

"Mowat scratched your legs while you held him upside down. Your skin and blood are under his nails. Besides, his watch undoubtedly fell out of his pocket and hung by the chain. You replaced the watch. Your fingerprints will be on it. Sharon, run!"

His face burning a dull red, Agnew squeezed the trigger. Hammond jerked aside as the bullet sang past his ear, and threw himself against Agnew's foot. The chair and Agnew went over backwards, and Agnew fired again as Hammond threw himself after him, smashed a blow to his face and pinned the gun under a knee.

"Get the police, Sharon."

Agnew's last defiant bit of rage

came as the cops took him away. He sneered at Sharon: "Just try to get any of that money."

Sharon covered his face. "As if I want it. Cripes, how bad do you think I am?"

Hammond patted his shoulder and left the house. Back at the office he saw a postman in the corridor about to hang a tag on his doorknob.

"What's it?" he asked.

He got a special delivery letter and signed for it. The letter was heavy, as the cab driver had said.

Seated at his desk, he ripped the envelope open. A paper several times folded fell out, and a note.

Dear Hammond,

I should have told you more, as you advised. If anything happens to me, I want you to see that Dave Sharon gets my insurance, and that Agnew does not take it away from him. I know you are Dave's friend.

OLIVER MOWAT

The insurance was for ten thousand, with double indemnity.

He blew his nose noisily, roughly wiped his eyes. That Mowat had been a grand old guy! Worried about the kid Sharon to the end.

"But I got that guy Agnew for it," he consoled himself.



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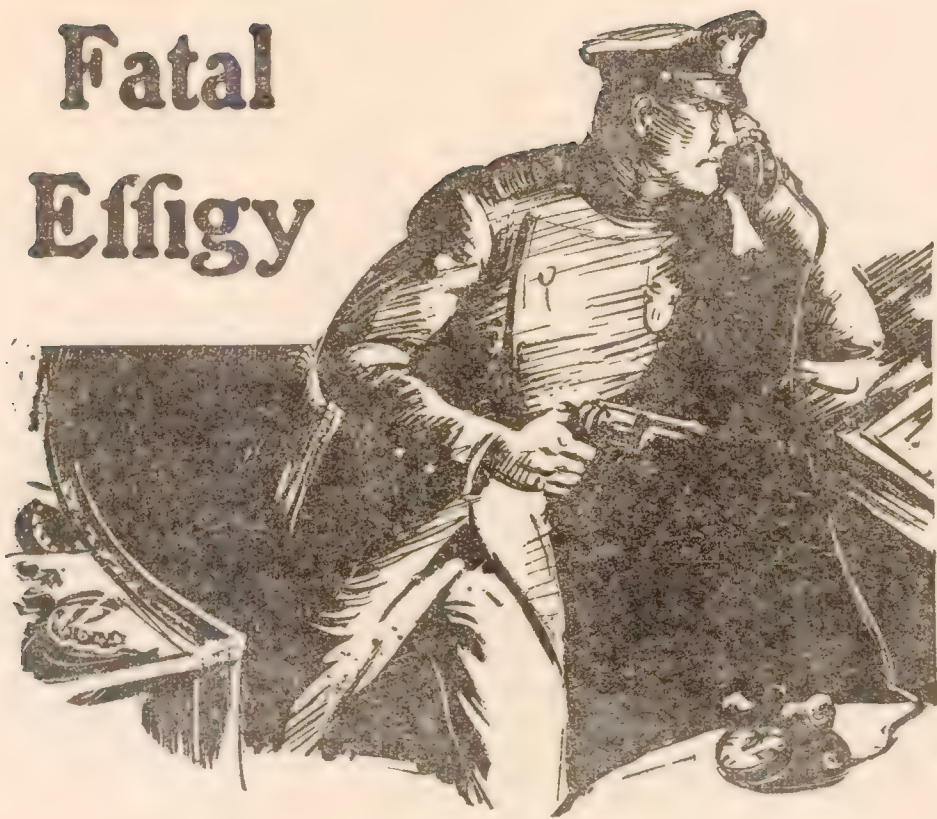
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Fatal Effigy



By Benton Greer

They were partners in business. But the important business to one partner was the silencing of the other—permanently. Yet silence has a way of thundering out loud—with a two-thousand year old echo.

MR. BRICKLEY walked into the office of Mr. Jennings. If there is any foundation for the adage that successful business partnerships are built upon contrast the firm of Jennings & Brickley, dental supplies, should be flourishing, even in these times. Oliver Jennings knew the dental supply business from the roots up and Bert Brickley knew how to get customers.

Mr. Brickley, short and rotund, and garbed in an eye-catching gray mixture, entered by the corridor door. The partners maintained separate offices

in the same suite and there was a connecting door between the two offices, but Brickley had misplaced the key. He undoubtedly could find it if he put his mind to the task, but such minor details annoyed him.

Jennings, crossing towards the filing cabinets with papers in hand, looked up over his spectacles. He, too, was short; about the same height as Brickley, but not nearly so plump. He was mild, meek, a typical business drudge with pale eyes and thinning gray hair.

"Did you want something Bert?"

"No, nothing particular," answered

the partner, toying with a cigar, his small dark eyes squinting through the smoke, "just having my office floor oiled."

The senior partner frowned. "Have that done every week, don't you?"

"Well, I got stuck with that oil. Might as well use it. Besides I like to have my place looking—impressive."

Jennings surveyed the unpretentious furnishings of his office defensively. Despite the fact the funds came from the same account the two offices contrasted just as severely as the two partners.

"Hmm, as long as it's serviceable, that's all that counts."

"Well, you know how it is. The people who come into my office—well, we have to make a show." It was an old argument, but the senior partner recognized the fundamental truth. Money had to be spent to make money, only Bert had extravagant habits he should curtail in times like these.

Jennings tugged at one of the drawers in the tall wooden file case and grumbled in exasperation as it stuck. He almost pulled the case over before he yanked the drawer open.

"You ought to get a new one of those," suggested Brickley. "It's out of date—"

"Can't afford it," snapped Jennings testily. He inserted the papers in the file and turned around.

"And while on the subject, Bert, we've got to put a little more pressure on our accounts."

Brickley waved the expensive cigar. "Oh, we can't be too hard on the dentists. People owe them money and take their time paying. We've got to be indulgent."

"Still, we ought to be getting more than we have." Jennings went to the closet for his coat and hat. He lunched between twelve and one while his junior partner, who arrived later in the morning and presumably had a later breakfast, went to lunch from one to two.

"I met Dr. Wynant yesterday," continued Jennings, pulling on his coat

carefully because of torn sleeve lining and not observing that his partner stiffened tensely. "I mentioned our account with him casually, and he said he felt certain he had settled with you."

"Well, you know Wynant," protested Brickley with a short laugh. "No head for business. He probably *thinks* he made payment. Not that he isn't good. I'll drop around and see him this afternoon."

"He is going up to Maine on a two weeks' hunting trip," said Jennings curtly. "That is what gets under my skin. If they can afford hunting trips they can afford to pay their bills."

"Right," agreed Brickley and seemed anxious to change the subject. He knew how to do so. He crossed to Jennings' desk and picked up a book.

"New one? And on Caesar, too."

Jennings frowned uneasily. "Why—it's a first edition. A real bargain."

"How much?" challenged the junior partner.

"Er—three hundred—but you don't understand."

"Sure I do. We all have our weaknesses. With me it's clothes and showy things. With you it's anything connected with Caesar."

"After all, it affords me enjoyment," said Jennings a bit tartly. "Are you coming?"

The senior partner locked the door behind them and stepped into the outer office. It was his custom to lock his door when leaving. Any phone calls would come through the switchboard and could be transferred to Brickley.

Bert Brickley went into his office, richly furnished in mahogany, and sat down to think, rolling his cigar thoughtfully in his mouth and occasionally doing some figuring on a pad.

When the senior partner returned from lunch, Bert Brickley departed immediately. He did not go directly to his favorite dining place but crossed to the Avenue where he liked to stroll leisurely as though very much a part of this atmosphere of luxury; smiling and bowing at the least provocation

and gazing into the art shops with all the appearance of a connoisseur.

But today he hurried rather than strolled; and he did little bowing and smiling. But he did, however, gaze in a shop window displaying antiques and pieces of art. If his memory served him right—yes, there it was!

The junior partner of Jennings & Brickley stepped inside and made a purchase.

BERT BRICKLEY'S phone buzzed. Jennings was on the other end of an inside call.

"Bert, come in here at once. There's—well, come in here."

Brickley went into the senior partner's office, passing through the outer office as usual to do so. He found, in addition to the perplexed senior partner, two deliverymen and a large crate.

"Bert, do you know anything about this? What did we ever order from Bentino's? That's an art shop."

"It's a little surprise from me," smiled the junior partner, rubbing spatulate fingers. "A real bargain I knew you would appreciate. Open it, boys. I'll need your help."

The two deliverymen went to work on the box and soon had the top removed. Carefully they separated the packing and then with difficulty lifted out a heavy bronze bust.

"Julius Caesar—almost in the flesh," exclaimed the junior partner, spreading his hands.

Jennings said nothing immediately. His sagging lips denoted mingled emotions. Of course the younger partner could not distinguish the enormous gulf between rare editions and manuscripts on Caesar and this grotesque monstrosity in bronze; yet Bert meant well, and Jennings was too gentle to offend.

"It's—it's very thoughtful of you, Bert. You shouldn't have spent your money this way. Er—I was wondering what I would do with it—"

"Put it right up here," suggested the junior partner, indicating the fil-

ing cabinet. "Come on, boys, give me a lift."

The senior partner was about to protest. To have that with him all day long forecasted torture; but on second thought he realized that if he did not keep it here he would have to bring it home and keep it exposed where Bert could see it any time he dropped in. No, better to have it here where he would be engrossed in work and able to forget about it; and with it reposing on the file cabinet his back would be to it most of the day. Even when he went to the cabinet he would have to look up almost deliberately to see it. After a time he could devise some excuse to get rid of the gift.

ABOUT a week following this exposition of generosity on the part of Bert Brickley, the junior partner returned from luncheon to find the office force in a state of confusion.

"Oh, Mr. Brickley—Mr. Brickley," moaned Miss Stevens, the old maidish secretary, "something dreadful has happened. There has been an accident."

"An accident?"

"Yes. Mr. Jennings. He's been killed. I phoned the police. Perhaps I shouldn't. Maybe I should have waited."

"You did exactly right, Miss Stevens. We'll let them take entire charge when they come."

"They are here."

"Here?" exclaimed Brickley. "Er—they must have been very prompt."

The junior partner stepped into Jennings' office. A tall, somewhat gawky young chap in blue uniform stood at the door; probably the policeman picked up at the corner. At Jennings' desk sat a middle-aged man in drab civilians. His round face denoted curiosity rather than shrewdness as Brickley entered.

"I'm the junior partner," announced Brickley. "Miss Stevens told me there had been an accident. Is it—serious?"

"Yeah, pretty serious," said the

headquarters man. "He's dead. That ain't official, of course. I have to wait for the coroner. But if he ain't dead I never saw a stiff."

Brickley peered past the desk. There on the floor near the filing cabinet lay the huddled form of the senior partner with matted blood in the thin gray hair. Near by on the floor reposed the upended bronze statue of Caesar.

"When did it happen?" asked Brickley.

"About quarter past one, if the dame outside phoned immediately like she said. She heard the crash and rushed in."

"I was to lunch. My office is next to this—"

"Yeah. I was there. Sit down, Mr. Brickley. I want some facts. We gotta turn in a report."

The junior partner took the other chair near the desk, careful to turn his back to the gruesome sight. There wasn't much to tell about Jennings. His age. Lived alone. No near relatives—

The headquarters man's feet went up on the desk as he tilted back in his chair. He saw Brickley frown.

"Seems natural to put my feet on the desk. It helps to think. Blood rushes to the head, or maybe it's the brains. Try it." The gray, level eyes seemed suddenly impelling. Brickley felt confused. "Try it," repeated the detective, "an' see if I ain't right."

Almost as if hypnotized Brickley obeyed. His feet lifted to the desk in a fashion similar to the detective's. If Jennings could see this lack of dignity . . .

"Think any better?"

"I—I can't say that I do."

"Well, just think back over the last

couple of hours. Say between twelve and one. Maybe I can help. Jennings, here, goes to lunch. You come in that door. Yeah, I know it ain't used much. You lost the key. But it was used recent. There's fingerprints. Too blurred to be read, but damp enough to show they were placed there recent. Fat fingers have a way of sweating.

"Then the last page of this report on the desk is missing. Jennings comes in; wonders where it can be, and finally goes to the file. Maybe he's mad. He don't look up and notice that the statue is balanced on the edge, havin' been shifted that way while he was out to lunch. He jerks open the drawer. It sticks anyway. I tried it. Down comes—who is it? Napoleon? Well, it don't matter. He did a complete job."

Brickley had been staring open-mouthed. Now he recovered his composure.

"Why—why, this is preposterous! Just because there are a few fingerprints on the door—"

"Fingerprints—hell! *Heel prints!* You're kind of short, Brickley, and you had to stand on a chair to fix that statue. You left your mark. Yours is the only office that was oiled recently. And, besides, these heels that you're so kindly showin' me are peculiar. Must be expensive. Well, there's an impression of one of them on the chair. No wonder I asked Miss Stevens if you bought that statue.

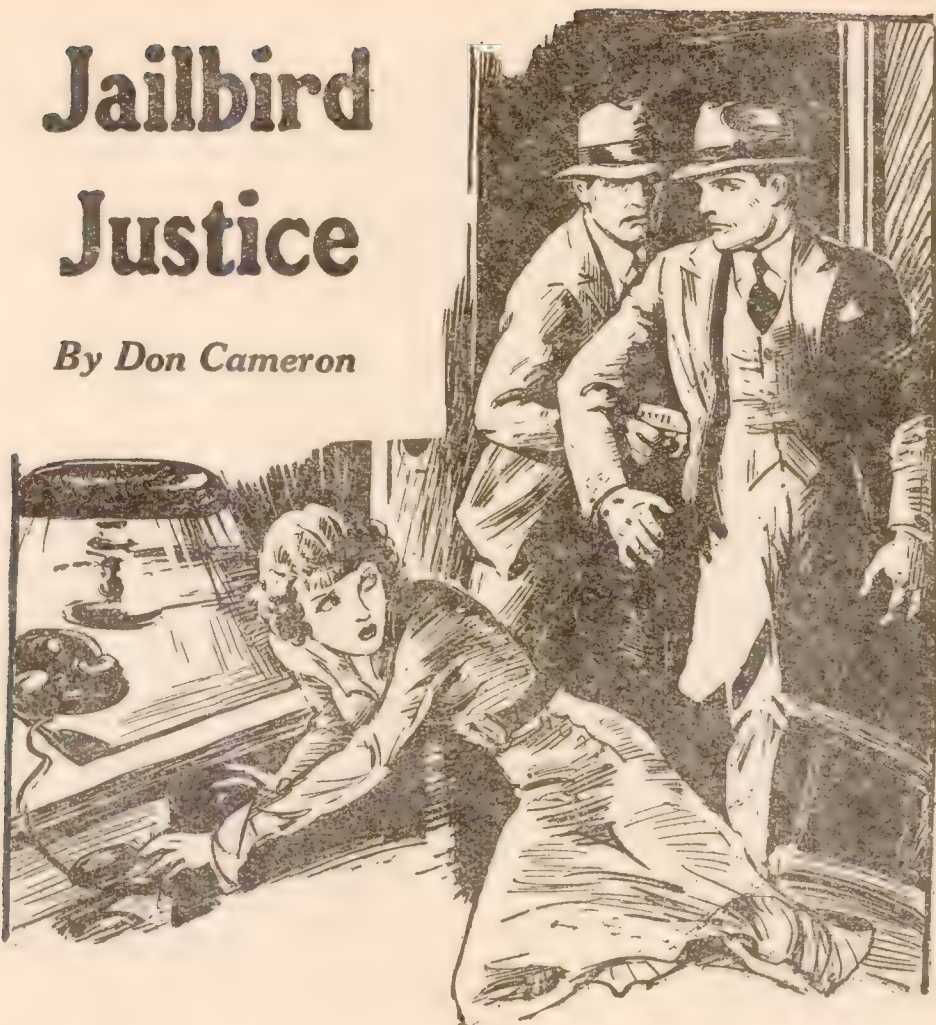
"Don't know the motive; but I've a hunch that if I impound the books I'll find it. I'm impoundin' them shoes, too. You'll have to come along in your stocking feet."

But just then Brickley looked as if he would have to go on a stretcher.



Jailbird Justice

By Don Cameron



A wayward son's return from prison was the signal for his father's death. And the justice of the law played jailbird tag—with shattered heritage.

PETER GORE hunched forward on the edge of the jouncing seat and extended a long arm, dangling a bill under the cabbie's nose. His forefinger veered toward a pair of stone gateposts, standing out of the night in the feeble glow of an ornamental lantern.

"That's the shebang," Gore said. "Slow down and I'll jump. Act like you were still on your way somewhere."

He stepped to the running board as the taxi braked. The soles of his shoes burned against concrete, scuffed gravel in the private drive. His features flashed into brief visibility as he darted past the lantern—gaunt, rudely handsome features under a dark mop of hatless hair.

The taxi rattled on. Swallowed by the blackness within the gate, Gore swung up his left wrist to glimpse the luminous hands of his watch. It was

ten minutes of nine. He glanced toward the peaked blob of a summer house beneath the trees, and stared intently past it at the sprawling bulk of Judge Madden's suburban home.

Yellow light sifted through blinds at one corner of the dwelling, where Gore knew the Judge's study was located. A single upstairs window, in the opposite wing, was illuminated. On the wide veranda he could just make out the shadowy figures of two men, standing together.

He frowned at this last, and kept close to clumps of shrubbery, trunks of trees, as he strode toward the summer house.

Jeanne Madden was waiting, her oval face and light frock barely showing through the dusk. Gore gripped her arms gently. His keen eyes had become somewhat accustomed to the night, but he searched her face in vain for marks of anxiety.

"What's wrong, honey?" he asked. "Why did you want me to hurry here and keep out of sight?"

She shivered, perhaps from the chill of the autumn evening. She brushed copper-colored hair from her forehead.

"It's Leslie. Dad got him paroled, Pete, without telling me, and brought him home this afternoon."

"The devil you say!" Gore's surprise was genuine. As chief investigator for the district attorney, he should have been one of the first to hear of any parole action. Especially since he had been personally responsible for the imprisonment, on forgery charges, of Leslie Madden, who was Judge Madden's wayward son and Jeanne's brother.

"Leslie swore he'd reformed. Dad used his influence—"

"Your dad didn't want to save Leslie six months ago, when he could have," Gore recalled. "He said Leslie needed a lesson—he'd got into trouble once too often."

The girl told him: "I guess he's had his lesson, and I guess Dad got over being angry. Anyway, since I phoned

you things have quieted down. At first Leslie was sullen and nasty. He and dad quarreled, and I was afraid. That's why I called your office. I couldn't speak plainly for fear some one might hear. But they reached some kind of understanding, apparently, and Leslie got very nice."

"If he stays nice," Gore murmured, "*we could be friends.*"

HE remembered that he owed young Madden something. If it hadn't been for him, Gore might never have met Jeanne, whom he was going to marry. It was an almost unbearable thought.

His ears caught the sound of a sash being raised, and then a familiar voice. He saw, framed in the lighted upstairs window, the silhouette of Arthur Denning, Judge Madden's secretary. Gore had known Denning a long time and liked him.

Denning leaned out above the two figures on the veranda.

"Les," he called. "You down there, Les? The judge was looking for you a while ago."

The immediate effect of the call was to send one of the men flying. He scuttled to the end of the veranda, leaped over a flower bed and vanished with amazing rapidity.

The other—it was undoubtedly Leslie Madden—shouted irritably, "Okay—okay!" and entered the house.

Gore watched for a minute or two without seeing any further sign of the man who had fled. He could hear Jeanne's quick, unnatural breathing. He squeezed her hand.

"Funny business," he mumbled.

The words were barely out of his mouth when the explosion came, short and sharp and ugly, spreading whip-crack echoes. Gore went rigid as a rock. Jeanne clung to him.

"A shot!" she gasped.

He nodded grimly. "Stay here, out of sight, till I call you." He thrust her father into the shadows, not heeding her protest. He began to run toward the house.

He was only a few yards from the veranda steps when, out of the tail of his eye, he saw a movement beneath the windows of the study. He whirled, darting his right arm toward the shoulder clip that held his automatic.

"Who is it?" he barked.

Scarlet flame stabbed at him out of a leafy bush. Lead sang waspishly close to his ear. Hurling himself aside, Gore slipped, fell heavily. He lay as he had fallen, very still, but with the pistol in his fist and his eyes watchful in the faint light.

Jeanne's panicky voice reached him. "Pete—are you hurt?" He saw the blur of her face and dress coming nearer.

He swore silently, forcefully.

The leafy bush stirred. Light glinted dully on a revolver barrel. The weapon bore ominously on the fallen investigator.

Gore's right wrist jerked. His automatic thundered. A cry of pain or fear arose, and the revolver dropped without firing a second time. The bush shuddered. Behind it footsteps pounded, diminishing, rounding the corner of the house.

Gore yelled: "Halt!" He lunged erect and raced forward, spraying the narrow beam of a pencil flash ahead of him.

He could see nothing.

"Pete!" Jeanne wailed. "Wait for me." She came panting up to him, flung her arms about him. "Who was it?"

He thought he knew the answer, but he only shrugged wearily. "I couldn't see. I may have hit him."

"We've got to find dad," she whispered in terror.

They hurried together up the steps, into the house, through the entrance hall. Light streamed to meet them from the open door of the study. A man was talking loudly, rapidly in the room.

On the threshold Gore froze, appalled by the sight that met his eyes. He tried to block Jeanne's view, but

she had already seen. She uttered a little moan and fainted in his arms.

He stood there for a long moment, torn by emotion, unable to look away from the body of Judge Madden, who had been his friend and the father of the girl he loved. The old man was sprawled on his back in the center of the book-lined room, before a fireplace in which scattered embers hissed. The wide-open eyes still held a look of incredulous horror, and the silver hair was stained with crimson around a bullet hole close to the right ear.

Arthur Denning crouched by the desk, shouting into a telephone. His blunt-featured face was distorted by what seemed to be a mixture of grief and anger; his big body trembled, his blond hair was disheveled.

". . . After I got downstairs, I looked out the window and saw young Madden running toward the back of the house. He'd fired another shot out in front. Maybe one of your squad cars can pick him up. For heaven's sake—hurry!"

DETECTIVE Sergeant Samuel Link's beefy face wore a look of fierce triumph as he barged into the study—a look that was dampened not at all by the appearance of the dead man and became tinged only slightly with chagrin upon his recognition of Peter Gore.

"Damned if I know how you got here," Link growled, "but you might as well go home. I got it all cleared up."

Gore was sitting by Jeanne, whose slim form he had stretched on a sofa, so placed that the massive desk concealed the corpse. She had regained consciousness and was weeping softly.

"So what?" Gore asked coldly. Ordinarily he ignored the feeling of rivalry that persisted between the police detectives and the D. A.'s investigation staff, but he was not fond of Sergeant Link. They had clashed frequently before this night.

Link thrust his hands into the pants

pockets of his wrinkled brown suit and expanded his big chest and bigger stomach.

"So I got the murderer, red-handed, as you might say." He called over his shoulder: "Bring him in, boys."

Two uniformed cops squeezed through the doorway, hustling a pitiful creature between them. Gore looked twice at the battered features before he recognized Leslie Madden.

The stocky youth's hair was matted, his eyes were dark and puffy, his lips were split. His suit was dirty and torn, and, as Link had said, he had been caught literally red-handed. An ugly groove cut across his right knuckles, and blood dripped from his fingertips.

Gore's hazel eyes hardened, seeing that hand. A bullet might have gouged just such a groove, and knocked a revolver free.

"You swore you'd get even when I sent you up," Gore said. "You almost finished me a few minutes ago."

Young Madden was hysterical. "I'd kill you all if I could," he yelled. "You never gave a guy an even break in your lives. I didn't kill him, but you'll see that I burn just the same."

Link sneered: "Sure, you'll burn. . . I was at the precinct station, Gore, when the call came in. I hopped in a squad car. We seen this jailbird come out of the woods, and he put up a hell of a scrap when we ran him down. Some luck, eh?"

"It would have to be luck," Gore declared. His brows were knitted. He was remembering the man who had fled so mysteriously from the veranda.

He asked Madden about it.

Madden glared, started to speak, hesitated. He mumbled finally: "It was a tramp, a beggar. I told him to beat it."

Arthur Denning wrenched his tortured gaze from the body. Gore knew the judge had been more than Denning's employer—had been practically a father to him, sending him to college and treating him as a member of the family and a business associate.

"I could hear Les and that fellow talking when I was upstairs," Denning said dully. "Les called him Nick. The handout he wanted was five thousand dollars—or else he'd make trouble for Les. Les was sore—said it was too much money."

"It would be Nick Spain," Gore hazarded. "Gambler, forger, black-mailer—he was one of the pals who got Les started wrong. Nick wasn't trying to make you rob your father, was he, Madden?"

"You figure it out," Leslie Madden said sullenly. "I told you all I know is that you're going to pin this on me."

"If you were innocent, why did you run?"

"I was in a spot. I'd just been paroled. The old man could have saved me from prison, but he didn't. We'd had an argument about whether he'd disinherit me. The housekeeper—she's away tonight—and Denning and Jeanne all heard it."

"Why did you take a shot at me?"

"I didn't."

Gore turned to one of the cops. "There's a revolver by the bushes outside the window. Get it. Be careful how you handle it. There ought to be fingerprints."

HE MADE another survey of the study. There were no signs of struggle, no overturned chairs. Just the dead man and the few drops of blood that had leaked from the fatal wound. Once he thought he saw a splash of blood on the hearthstone, but it was only a shred of scarlet paper.

He had already glanced through the desk and the wastebasket. He smoothed a wrinkled, curiously bent sheet of notepaper that had been in the basket. It was blank on both sides.

Sergeant Link grinned. "Quit fussing, Gore. I got everything under control."

More cops came in, detectives and fingerprint men. A photographer set

up a big camera. The revolver was brought in, carried gingerly by a pencil thrust into the barrel.

Jeanne grasped Gore's sleeve and drew him down beside her. Her lovely face was pale as wax but her tears had stopped.

"Are you sure Leslie did it?" she asked.

Gore avoided a direct answer. "It looks bad for him."

"I'm not," she told him. "I don't know why—maybe it's intuition or maybe I just don't want to think he did it. Leslie was weak and dishonest, but he was never the type to kill a man, especially his own father. Even if he'd wanted to, he'd have known he couldn't get away with it."

He patted her hand. His own feelings were too mixed for him to know certainly whether he agreed with her, but he had to admit there was reason in what she said.

Young Madden had slumped into a chair by the closed windows, his face buried in his hands, his whole appearance wretched and abject. A cop hovered close to him, watchfully.

The fingerprint man straightened from his litter of paraphernalia, very self-satisfied.

"Leslie Madden's fingerprints are on the gun," he announced. "No one else's."

Link chuckled. "There's no question but what it's the right gun. Same caliber—"

The sergeant stopped speaking, startled into momentary paralysis. Everyone in the room was shocked for an instant, unable to move, by the furious reaction of Madden.

He sprang erect, eyes blazing madly with desperation. His voice was a nerve-tearing shriek.

"Damn you, I won't burn! I won't go back to prison!"

He spun and leaped at the nearest window, elbows upraised. His body struck the heavy glass, shattering it.

Gore acted more swiftly than the others, snatching his pistol from its

clip and aiming it. For a fractional second the sights rested upon Madden's figure.

Then Jeanne tugged at Gore's arm, pulling it downward, while the fugitive dropped into the night. They could hear the thud of his feet striking the earth.

There was a bedlam of shouts. Flashlights raked white fingers over the law. Cops sprinted for the doorway and crowded the windows. Two or three guns barked.

Jeanne said: "I couldn't let you do it, Pete. I couldn't."

He smiled thinly. "It's just as well."

Link returned to the study, his face beaded with sweat and purpled with anger. He glowered balefully.

"Gone," he rumbled. "You could of plugged him, Gore. You could of chased him. Damned if I don't think you're glad."

The investigator's smile brightened. "Why, sergeant!" he said. "I was sure I heard you say you had everything under control."

WALKING with Gore and Jeanne Madden outside the house, Denning waved an arm, indicating the thick bushes and hedges and the edge of the woods at the rear.

"The cops think Les tried for distance," Denning said, "but he'd have been a fool to do it. The smart thing would be to hide somewhere and wait for a chance to sneak out. A hundred men could hunt all night and not find him here."

Gore grunted. "That goes for Spain, too. If he hadn't finished his business with Madden when you scared him, he'd hang around. Anyway, I doubt if he had time to get clear before you called the cops. His best bet would be to sit still."

"Let's look for Leslie," Jeanne pleaded. "If the police find him, he'll fight again and they'll kill him. Maybe if we treat him like a human being—don't condemn him without a hearing—he'll help us to learn the truth."

Denning's tone was pitying. "The truth is plain enough. Your father talked about cutting Les out of his will and Les couldn't bear to have that happen." He clenched his fists. "But I'll help you look. As long as he's free none of us is safe."

He strode away. Gore steadied Jeanne with his arm, for the secretary's words had struck her like a blow.

"Keep your chin up," he told her. "There's still plenty to be explained. Nick Spain wasn't here for any good."

But he spoke without conviction, because Madden's fingerprints on the revolver would be damning evidence in any court. There were no other direct clues—nothing more than a shred of paper that resembled a spatter of blood, and a sheet of stationery that had been curiously bent and wrinkled.

A couple of policemen with lanterns were studying the sod near the house, trying to pick up Madden's trail. Gore knew it was almost hopeless. Sergeant Link was depending mostly upon a blockade of roads and, after daylight, a thorough search of the district.

A noise of footsteps stiffened Gore. It was Denning, signaling excitedly as he hurried toward them. When he was near enough, Denning whispered:

"I've spotted 'em. They're talking it over."

Gore followed him toward the woods. And despite his efforts to send her back to the house, Jeanne trailed along.

"I'll go to pieces unless I keep moving," she asserted.

He understood. Sheer nerve was holding her up. Grief and sorrow would overtake her soon enough—and it would be double grief if, in addition to her father being murdered, Leslie should be proved the murderer.

Impersonally, without trying to guess whether it was Leslie or Spain or a third person, as yet unsuspected,

Gore cursed that murderer from the bottom of his heart.

"Be quiet," Denning warned. "Keep behind the shrubbery."

They slunk along, bent nearly double. Gore heard the whisper of wind in the leaves and occasional snatches of talk from the direction of the house. Then, so softly that at first he doubted his ears, he heard a murmur of voices ahead.

Denning halted in the shadow of a spreading tree. Gore crept close to him, holding his breath. Before them lay a tiny hollow, ringed by foliage, and in the center of the hollow were two formless shadows.

A nasal, whining voice spoke impatiently: "You ain't got any choice, Les. You count me in or you burn in the chair. Give me a written confession you bumped off your old man, and I'll see you through this. I'll give you a chance to buy back the confession when you get the dough that's coming to you."

Madden's deeper tones replied: "It wouldn't do any good, Nick. They'd catch me, and I wouldn't have a leg to stand on."

"You're screwy, kid. We can pull a sneak out of this spot. I can hide you so they'll never find you till you're ready. I know lawyers that will do anything for a profit. We can frame somebody to take the rap for you."

"It would be a rotten trick," Madden said. "Still, the only other thing in sight is the chair—"

BEHIND the tree Gore balanced the automatic in his fist and waited breathlessly for Madden's next words. He could feel Jeanne's slender body tensing against him.

Madden said finally: "What have I got to lose? I'll write a confession for you as soon as we get away from here."

"Now you're smart," Nick applauded. "Let's get going."

Gore stepped through the branches that screened the little hollow. He

held the pistol steady, and his voice was grim.

"Put 'em up. The charge is murder, and you're both in it."

Madden choked back a frightened cry and stood rigid. Nick Spain swung around, his hand darting toward his coat pocket—but when he saw Gore's pistol he thought better of whatever he had intended doing, and raised his arms.

"Not me," Nick rasped. "It was Madden done the rubout."

"You were going to help him get away," Gore pointed out. "That makes you an accessory, and equally guilty—"

"Leslie!" Jeanne shrilled.

Gore realized abruptly that, while he had been watching Spain, Madden had edged away from them. Madden made a break now, springing toward the inky blackness of the woods.

The investigator's gun swiveled. It wasn't a question any more of giving Jeanne's brother the benefit of any doubt—it was a question of stopping a confessed killer. Gore's trigger finger squeezed relentlessly and his jaw was hard. Even in the dark, he shouldn't miss—

And then another hurtling shadow blotted out the shadow of the fleeing youth. Gore held back the bullet at the last split-second to avoid hitting Denning. The secretary shot through the air in a flying tackle. His outstretched hands reached for Madden's legs, grasped them—and slid away, clutching empty air. The tackler struck earth heavily. The fugitive sped on.

"Too bad," Gore muttered, sighting the pistol again.

"Drop it!" Nick rasped suddenly. "Drop that rod and reach high!"

The slim crook swept his hand up from his coat pocket as he spoke, and the hand held a revolver. Gore hesitated for the merest instant, then let the pistol slip out of his fingers. He choked back fury and advised: "Don't be a fool, Nick."

"I ain't no fool. I been up against the law before and came through it, but I ain't standing no murder rap."

"You won't save your neck this way."

"The hell I won't!" Nick grated. "You been trying to hang a murder on me, so I'll give you one. I'll give you three. I'll put a slug in each of you and nobody will know I was even near this joint."

"The cops will run you down."

"I'll take a chance. If I get clear, they'll blame Madden. I'll get that confession from him and then I'll be set."

Jeanne's voice was a ghost of a whisper. "Don't do it, Nick. There's been enough killing—"

Gore's hands were shoulder-high, but he took a chance and put one arm around Jeanne's shoulders. He held her tightly for a second and then twisted his body so that she was partly shielded. He was going to leap in a moment straight toward the revolver and probably he was going to die with a bullet in his heart or his brain, but he might save her life.

He could see Denning gathering himself for a last desperate struggle, too. Denning was just straightening after his fall and his shoulders were hunched ominously.

Nick said brightly: "If I don't have to feed you lead, it'll be nicer, see? The cops won't hear no noise, and I won't have to hurry. But if any of you starts yelling or running, I'll blast you to little pieces."

NICK whirled with lightning speed upon Denning. Nick's right arm moved and the revolver flashed in a glittering arc. Denning was caught utterly off guard; the steel struck his skull with a sickening sound. The secretary crumpled.

"Get the idea, copper?" Nick gloated, twisting back and aiming the gun at the investigator before the latter could make a move. "Now I can dust him off at leisure and it won't hurt a bit. Will you have the same?"

"Mine'll be lead," Gore snapped through set teeth.

He leaned forward, bending his knees. His eyes were riveted on Nick's right hand, watching the forefinger nestling around the trigger. If he could only get his lanky frame in motion before the slug battered him. . .

"You're asking for it," Nick snarled. "Here it is!"

Even as he leaped, Gore was surprised to hear a crashing of bushes instead of a roar of gunfire. His eyes were closed so that he saw nothing—but he felt his shoulder strike a body that was suddenly limp. And as he fell and rolled with that body his hand came in contact with a warm, slippery fluid, and his nostrils recognized the sweetish odor of blood.

He blinked down at the smashed, bleeding head of Nick Spain beneath him and at the jagged rock that had smashed it. Then he blinked up at Leslie Madden's stocky figure.

Madden's hands hid his face. He babbled in utter horror: "My heavens, I killed him! Now I really am a murderer. But I couldn't let him kill Jeanne, and I had that rock in my hand—"

Gore got slowly to his feet. "That wasn't murder. You saved three lives. Nick was a rat who needed killing."

"It was my last chance," Madden moaned. "Nick was going to get me out of this. He knew where I could hide—"

"Snap out of it!" Gore commanded gruffly. "Nick wasn't going to do you any favor. Once he got your confession, he'd own you body and soul. If you inherited the estate, he'd milk you dry. If you didn't, he'd turn you in for a reward."

"He came here to blackmail me," Madden said. "He heard I was out of prison. He had a check I forged—one I was never caught with. He was going to send me back to prison unless I paid five thousand dollars. I didn't have the money, and I was afraid to tell him dad had cut me out of his will,

and was going to wait a year before putting me back—"

"What?"

"Dad changed the will when I went to prison," Madden explained. "He said I hadn't been a good son to him and he was going to leave his money to some one who had been."

Gore whistled softly. "That changes things. It leaves you without a motive. Why should you kill your father, knowing you'd lose a fortune unless he lived at least a year?"

"I wouldn't have killed him under any circumstances," Madden said wearily. "I was willing to sign a phony confession for Spain just to get away and take a chance on getting it back later. I thought a lot of Dad and I was sincere about reforming. But when it happened and I found everybody against me, I knew I was sunk. I wouldn't even waste my breath denying it. I just wanted to hide."

Jeanne leaned impulsively toward her brother. "I believe you," she said, her words coming in a rush of happiness. "I knew all along you couldn't have done it." Her eyes sought Gore. "Don't you see, Pete? If what happened to Nick horrified him—"

"I see," Gore said, "and I don't see. Didn't you take a shot at me, Madden? That wound on your hand—"

"I cut it fighting with the cops. I didn't shoot at anyone."

Denning stirred, groaned and sat up. Gore could see the dark blood streaking his cheek, flowing from a gash over his eye where the revolver had struck a glancing blow.

Denning mumbled: "What about Nick? Maybe Nick did it."

GORE shook his head. "I saw Nick run away. He didn't have a chance to do any shooting." His voice hardened. "But the man who was to benefit by the changed will would have had a motive—the one who had been more like a son to the judge than Les—"

The secretary snorted. "Meaning me? As a matter of fact, the judge did

say something about remembering me in his will. But I was upstairs in my room when he was killed. You must have heard me calling Leslie just before the shot."

"That's true," Gore admitted. "And Madden's fingerprints were on the revolver—"

Madden broke in: "Denning and I were alone in the study this afternoon, and he asked me to load dad's gun. That explains my prints. I kept my mouth shut about it because I couldn't figure out why there weren't other prints, too."

"There must be an explanation," Jeanne said.

doors and windows were shut, and you probably had the gun muffled in cloth. Nobody heard the shot.

"You see, you overheard Jeanne's phone conversation with me, and knew I was about due. When you'd killed him, you opened the doors and went upstairs to call Leslie. But first you set a Fourth of July firecracker in the fireplace, with a long fuse attached to it, knowing it would explode just after Leslie had gone into the house. When the firecracker went off, we all thought it was the murder shot.

"That shred of red paper on the hearth was a part of the wrapping of the firecracker—"



Denning's tone was heavy with disdain. "There would be—if it was true. But Les is just trying to lie his way out of it at my expense. Do you think the cops will believe a jailbird? They won't be fooled by any fireworks—"

"Fireworks!" The exclamation burst involuntarily from Gore's lips. The sudden illumination in his mind was like a burst of rockets, showing him the significance of clues that had been meaningless, making the whole puzzle clear.

He made for Denning ominously. "You're right. The cops won't be fooled by fireworks—not any longer. When you killed the judge, the study

"You're dreaming, Gore!"

"Madden got to the study just in time to hear the bang and see his father's body. He knew he'd be blamed. All he could think of was to get away. He ran through the back door.

"Meanwhile, you ran downstairs, as anyone would have, and slipped out to take that pot shot at me. Probably you didn't care whether you hit me or not—the main thing was to have the gun found, with Madden's fingerprints—"

"But not *my* fingerprints!"

"We'll produce yours, too, when the time comes. You must have wrapped the butt of the revolver in that twisted

sheet of notepaper I found in the wastebasket. That kept you from smudging Madden's prints. But you didn't stop to think that the paper would hold the curve of the butt of the gun, and your prints would be on it—"

The words caught in the investigator's throat. He stared unbelievably at the ugly snout of the pistol in Denning's hand. Denning still sat on the ground, but his arm was steady and there was no sign of weakness about him.

"You're too smart," the secretary said. "I used to like you. I liked the judge, too. But a man's best friend is the almighty dollar, and once the old man signed that estate over to me, I couldn't see him hand it back to his no-good son. I killed him, like I'm going to kill you—"

AS GORE leaped, weaponless, the world seemed to explode in his face. Denning's bullet struck him like a mighty fist, hurling him backward. The earth came up and struck him.

The pistol roared a second time, and Madden coughed and stumbled. On his hands and knees, Madden blundered into Gore, jarring him painfully.

Jeanne's scream rose piercingly and was echoed by excited shouts from the house.

"Yell your damn head off!" Denning jeered. "I'll have the last word. I'll blast you all, the way Nick was going to. But I won't have to run. I'll say Leslie did it, and I managed to get the gun away from him at the last and kill him!"

Gore's arms were like lead, his muscles like soft putty, but he moved them by sheer power of will. He clung to the thought that somewhere near him lay two weapons—his own pistol and the gun Nick had dropped. If he could reach either one. . .

"No, you don't!" Denning blurted.

A third shot bellowed, and grains of sand leaped close to Gore's face, stinging him.

The investigator's groping right hand touched a hard, cold object. His fingers curled around a familiar scored grip. The pistol weighed a ton, but somehow he lifted it.

He fired straight into a fourth spurt of flame from Denning's weapon. He heard a choked cry, a thudding of many feet. He lay back, fighting agony in his right shoulder.

Then Jeanne was beside him, and in the glare of flashlights he saw that she was unharmed. He managed to sit up and noticed Madden crouched nearby, his face pale, staring at a widening red stain against the gray of his trousers where a bullet had punctured his thigh. Denning sprawled on his back ten feet away, and by the amount of blood that bubbled from his stomach Gore guessed he was done for. But Denning was talking, nevertheless.

"Cripes!" sputtered Sergeant Link, stooping over Denning. "Cripes, he's saying he done the killing! Well, I'll be—"

Some one was shaking Gore's hand. He looked and it was Leslie Madden, and there was an expression in the youth's face that said volumes more than his faltering words.

"I thought you had it in for me, like the rest of them," Madden blurted. "I was wrong. Since we're going to be brothers-in-law, Gore, we might as well be pals, too."

Jeanne was crying, but they were happy tears. Gore pulled his hand free of Madden's grasp so that he could put his good arm around her, where it belonged.

He grinned over her burnished head at the fat sergeant.

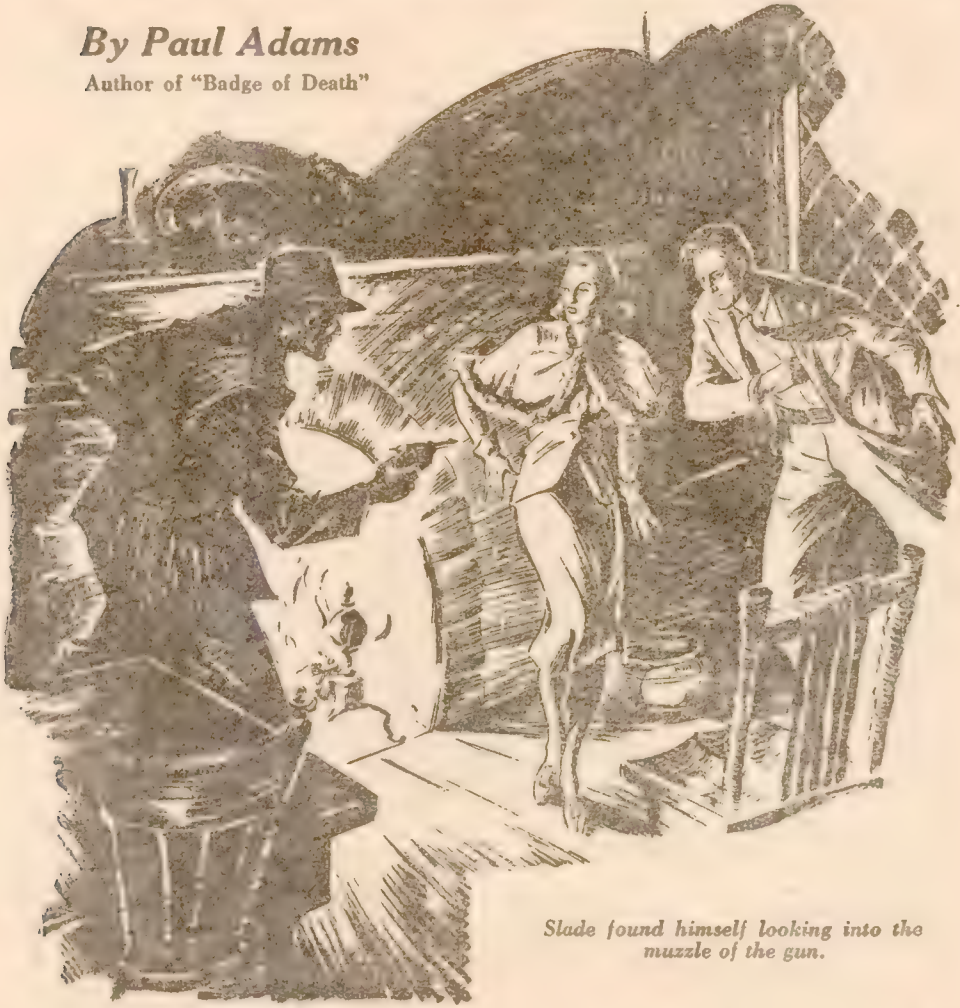
"You might as well go home, Link," he said. "I've got everything under control."



Mausoleum Mission

By Paul Adams

Author of "Badge of Death"



Slade found himself looking into the muzzle of the gun.

When Detective Slade plunged into the mystery of the looted crypts, he was one step ahead of a grisly grave himself. For the Grim Reaper was going to mix cold steel with cold ice.

CAPTAIN RYAN strode into the station-house, greeted the lieutenant on duty at the desk, and disappeared into his office.

"Send in Slade," he bellowed.

Sergeant Storm Slade, playing pinochle in the back room, heard the order. He smoothed out the wrinkles in his double-breasted blue coat and swung into the captain's office.

"Sit down, Slade." Ryan pointed a fat finger at a chair beside his desk. "Something hellish has happened, Slade, no kidding. Some damn fiend is loose."

"Yeah?"

"Well, Doctor Gilmore had the top of his head carved off last night in Longwood Cemetery. I've seen him. His head looks like a teapot with the

lid missing. His wife saw the thing happen and it sent her nuts. She's raving."

"Doc Tom Gilmore?" Storm Slade asked.

"Yeh, Tom Gilmore. His wife used to be a trained nurse. Most sensible woman I ever knew. Not a nerve in her body. Yet what she saw sent her haywire. She was found this morning, unconscious, on Serpentine Road in the cemetery. When I talked to her she was half delirious. They gave her morphine. In about an hour now she ought to talk sense, the coroner says. Get over there. It's your case."

Sergeant Slade rose awkwardly to his feet. He stood, six feet three, before the captain. His nose, in harmony with his lean though muscular body, was long and narrow. And long and narrow were his gray eyes. His head, thrust forward on his long neck, reminded Ryan of a gargoyle.

The captain pressed his fingers hard into Slade's bony arm.

"Look here, Storm," he said seriously, "you've got brains and imagination. You'll need 'em both on this case. Go easy, son, for I've a hunch we're up against something pretty rotten. You'll know what I mean when you see the body."

Storm Slade's wide shoulders sloped sharply, like the sides of an army tent. He shrugged them with a rhythmic, muscular movement.

"Thanks, captain," he said. "I'll ease over to the doc's now."

A HALF hour later Storm Slade brought his green police roadster to a stop before the Gilmore bungalow. As he stepped out he glanced over at Longwood Cemetery. The Gilmore place was only a few hundred feet from the archway that gave access from the south to one of Long Island's oldest burial grounds.

Slade swung his long legs up the cement walk to the bungalow and pressed the bell. A moment later he was being conducted to Mrs. Gilmore

by an old woman who came in answer to his ring.

The doctor's wife was in bed, her head supported by two pillows. The results of a dreadful mental shock were written on her face. Beneath her eyes were crescent puffs of blue. The corners of her mouth twitched as she tried to smile at Storm.

"Was it you I was talking to before?" she asked. "I guess I wasn't quite rational. You see—Oh, heavens! it was so horrible . . ." A shudder shook her body.

"Just tell me, as simply as you can, what happened." Slade's voice was gentle, kind. "Then I'll go. You need rest."

"Oh, I'll never sleep again. When I close my eyes I see it . . . I see it again."

She covered her face with trembling hands as if trying to blot out the vision.

"Tell me, beginning with last evening, what you and Dr. Gilmore did."

"We went to the movies at Monnitouque, the second show. It was such a beautiful night. We walked back through the cemetery. It's shorter that way, you know, than by Comstock Corners. We were walking up Serpentine Drive when we heard a strange squealing. It sounded as if it came from one of the vaults we had just passed.

"The doctor thought a dog was hurt and went back. I waited in the road for him. He went up the little path toward the vault. Then he suddenly stopped near the entrance. I could see his face in the moonlight. He looked as if he'd been stricken with paralysis. Perfectly white. Then he screamed. He screamed, I tell you! And he has nerves like steel. He's a surgeon."

Mrs. Gilmore suddenly sat bolt upright in bed. Her eyes dilated. "He screamed, he screamed," she kept on repeating.

Storm Slade crossed the room and sat on the side of the bed. He pressed the woman quietly back onto the pillows.

"Easy, now, easy," he said gently.

In a weak voice she continued. "An arm came out of the vault. It swung up and then it struck. I fainted. I was unconscious. I woke up there. I don't know anything else. They tell me my husband is dead. I can still hear him scream. Oh, I can still hear him scream!"

Slade put his hand on her damp forehead.

"Easy, now, easy," he repeated.

For a moment her eyelids fluttered. Then they slowly closed. Mrs. Gilmore had sunk into a merciful sleep.

"Where is Doctor Gilmore's body?" Slade asked the old servant.

Without answering she led him to a bedroom on the other side of the bungalow. She pointed at a door and shuffled off toward the rear of the cottage.

Slade entered the room.

Rigor mortis had stiffened Dr. Gilmore's body by the time they found him that morning doubled up on the gravel path before the Markham tomb. His body, propped against the headboard of the bed in a sitting position, looked like an animated cadaver. The sight of him jolted Slade to a stop. The corpse gazed with eyes that seemed alive. They were opened wide. The huge pupils seemed fixed on a vision of unspeakable horror. They gazed straight ahead with sightless perception at something diabolical, loathsome. The top of his head was truncated, a crimson oval.

Slade felt nauseated. He wheeled and left the room.

HE loped down the cement walk and vaulted into the roadster. It shot forward and passed under the archway into the cemetery. The wheels crunched as the car swung onto the gravel of Serpentine Drive.

The grilled doors to the Markham crypt were open. The lock had been smashed beyond repair. Slade stepped inside. Through the dim light within he saw the side walls lined with double tiers of caskets, eight on each side,

three on the single tier at the back. The bottom shelf was empty. Its burden had been dragged to the center of the vault.

Slade pressed the button of his flashlight and directed the circle of light on the coffin at his feet. The lid had been forced off, splintering the wood where the screws had fastened it down. The hollow eyes of a skull stared up at him. Storm flashed the light about the interior of the coffin. A leg and several ribs were missing. He aimed the shaft of light at the floor of the vault. Several bones lay scattered about. In the midst were pieces of a broken crucifix.

Slade gathered the pieces, fitting them together. They assembled into a cross about fourteen inches long. He replaced it in the coffin and strode out of the musk-scented dampness of the tomb into the warmth of the late afternoon sun.

Storm Slade, back in the green roadster, headed for the stone house of the caretaker, Briggs. Jeff Briggs, sixty, bald, toothless, sat in a rocking chair, half asleep, under an elm tree near the side door of the cottage. His eyes blinked open as Slade approached.

"Lo, sergeant," he said.

"Listen, Briggs, I want to know what you can tell me about the Markham outfit."

Briggs sucked his thin lips into his mouth and looked sharply at Storm.

"Queer business, ain't it?" he said. "Guess you know more'n I do."

"Anything queer about the Markhams?" Slade asked.

"Nope! Only it ain't normal—just males being buried in that vault. Cyrus Markham, Aaron Markham, Cyrus Markham, Aaron Markham, eight generations of 'em. And I seen four of 'em stowed away meself."

"You mean only the male Markhams are buried in the vault?"

"That's the truth of it, sergeant. Women didn't count for much to the lights of the Markhams, I guess. The last Aaron was put away fifteen years ago. No room for more. So the last

Cyrus is sleeping in the ground over at the Markham estate. He died last August."

"And that was the end of the family?" Slade asked.

"According to the lights of the men, I reckon. There's just the Markham girl left. Her that's living over in the tenant house on the old estate. They went broke, I heard tell."

"Where's the Markham estate?" Slade demanded sharply.

"On the Woodbury Road — 'bout half a mile beyond the Stardale Golf Club. Round an hour's drive from here if you make it right smart."

IT was already dark when Slade pulled up at the tenant house in the Markham estate. The small frame cottage was set back in a grove of locust trees. The moonlight, filtering through their leafy branches, splashed a patchwork of white against its clapboard exterior. A faint amber light glowed through the windows to the right of the doorway.

Slade found the bell and pressed it. He heard the buzzer sound inside, and then light footsteps approaching. The door swung open and he saw Dale Markham silhouetted against the light from an oil lamp on the hall table. Her red hair gleamed brilliant against it. She looked at him with large, inquiring blue eyes.

"Your family vault was broken into last night," Slade said.

"Yes, I read about it in the papers." Her voice was low, throaty. Storm liked it.

"I'm a cop. I want to ask you some questions," he said.

"Come in." She swung the door wide open. "I'm glad you've come."

He followed her into the living-room. She motioned toward a morris-chair and seated herself on the couch facing it. Silent, she waited for him to speak.

Slade sank back against the cushion of the chair, and looked into her cool, intelligent eyes.

"Have you any idea what it's all about?" he asked.

"I've read the lurid newspaper story, that's all," she answered.

Fan-shaped wrinkles spread out from the corners of Slade's eyes. "I found a crucifix broken into four pieces and scattered around the crypt. Could that have any special significance?"

Dale Markham's large eyes grew larger and brighter. She moved forward toward to the edge of the couch.

"The Markhams are always buried with a crucifix. They always had queer ideas about death. They all died of cancer, generation after generation. Always the males seemed to be afflicted with it, and a little mad, at that. The women were ostracized—perhaps, because they weren't tainted. But father had a different intellect. He devoted his life to research. I worked with him until he died a few months ago. Another year of work and we might have rid the world of the greatest curse known to mankind. But now! Well, there is no money to go on."

"You rent the old mansion?" Slade asked.

"Yes, the rental almost pays the taxes. Father had a big practice and a big income. He spent it all on our cancer research work. He trained me to carry on. But there's nothing to carry on with, except this mortgage-burdened estate."

"Tell me about these ancestors of yours," said Slade. "They were very rich once?"

"The first Cyrus," said Dale, "was fabulously rich. It was he who bought this property in 1820. But his fortune mysteriously disappeared according to the legend. The family has lived in proud respectability ever since. The Markhams alternated the names of Cyrus and Aaron, between father and son. But what's this got to do with the violation of my ancestors' vault?"

Slade leaned forward and ran his long fingers through his hair.

"Miss Markham," he said, "this is deadly serious. I need your help. The

crime last night is but the beginning, or I miss my guess. It's tied up somehow with the past—with the history of your family."

Dale Markham rose suddenly to her feet. She crossed to Slade and rested her hand upon his arm.

"I don't know your name," she said. "Storm Slade."

"Mr. Storm Slade, speak plainly. Do you think there is something in this besides the pure vandalism of a deranged person?"

"I believe," said Slade, rising to his feet, "that this is only the start of something conceived by a fiend—that hideous things may happen, unless we can forestall them. I must know about your family. Please tell me."

Dale Markham looked steadily into Slade's eyes.

"The family history is recorded in outline in the old family Bible," she said. "Excuse me, I'll get it."

Storm Slade watched her lithe body disappear through a doorway leading to a room in the rear. His eyes remained fixed on the black oblong through which she had passed.

Suddenly the silence was pierced by a scream, a scream of wild terror.

SLADE bounded through the doorway. In the inky blackness he could see nothing. A board creaked on the opposite side of the room.

Slade reached for his gun. Something hissed by his ear and thudded into the paneled wall by his head. A blue flame spurted from his gun. In the flash, he saw the dim outline of a man. A door slammed as the apparition disappeared.

Slade stumbled forward and wrenched open the door. He glimpsed for a second a fleeting shadowy figure, streaking toward the wood. It was instantly swallowed up in the darkness beneath the locust trees.

He wheeled. On the floor lay the crumpled figure of Dale Markham. He kneeled down, scooping his arms under her. He lifted her limp body, and carried it into the sitting-room.

She was still in his arms when her eyes opened. He placed her gently on the couch.

"Sorry," she said, sitting up suddenly. "What happened? Oh, yes, I remember. I fainted, didn't I?"

"Where are the lights in there?" Slade asked, pointing toward the dark room.

"There's an oil lamp on the center table."

She followed Slade into the room and held the chimney while he lit the wick. Then he crossed the room and jerked a butcher's cleaver from the oak paneling. Its razor-sharp edge, embedded three inches, had split a long seam in the hard wood.

"Tell me just what happened," he asked, as he placed it on the table.

"I had just picked up the Bible. I didn't need any light because the Bible's always been on the library table right there, since I brought it over here from the other house. Suddenly someone sprang out and snatched the Book from my hands. He must have been crouching behind the chair there. It was silly of me to faint that way."

Dale smiled bravely at Slade.

Slade gripped her by the elbow. He guided her back into the living room. They sat facing one another. His long eyes were fixed on her in undisguised admiration.

"Miss Markham," he smiled, "tell me how much of the family history was in this Bible that our phantom ran off with."

"Oh, mostly dates of births and deaths and weddings. You know—the usual sort of thing in a family record."

"Can you imagine why anyone would want to steal it?"

"Of course not. I'm the last of the Markhams. I can't conceive of its being of interest to anyone else."

"Damn it," said Slade. Rising to his feet, he paced the room with long strides. "I can't dope it out. But I've a hunch that more gruesome things will happen in the Markham vault."

"It is pretty gruesome," she asserted.

"You live here alone?" Slade asked. "You see, I'm going back to Longwood Cemetery, and I hate to leave you without—"

"Oh, I'm all right," Dale interrupted. Her head held high, she looked at Storm through clear blue eyes. "It was just unexpected, that's all. I'm really not given to fainting spells. Anyhow, the man got what he wanted. So there's no reason for him to come back."

Her matter-of-factness was too genuine, Slade thought, to admit of any bravado or play-acting. He took his Colt automatic from his pocket and tossed it on the couch.

"I'd feel more comfortable if you had that around," he said. "Can you use it?"

"Oh, yes," Dale laughed, "though I'm better with a shotgun. I hold the local record with clay pigeons."

IT WAS eleven o'clock when Storm Slade parked his car near the entrance of Longwood Cemetery. He made his way cautiously up Serpentine Drive, keeping within the shelter of the darkness beneath the ancient elm trees. As he approached the Markham vault he swung back farther from the road.

Carefully he worked his way on hands and knees to within a hundred feet of the entrance. He parted a hedge of rhododendron bushes and crept through noiselessly. The grilled gateway was clearly visible, its iron scrolls outlined against a pale green-blue light that came from within the tomb.

Slade crept forward. Something was moving inside the vault. He saw a shadow, weird, distorted, against the inner wall. The shadow slowly took the form of two enormous hands holding a crucifix. A sudden snap broke the breathless stillness of the night. The monster hands held two pieces of a broken cross.

Slade's hand struck a loose stone. It rattled down onto the cement walk.

The shadow and the blue-green glow disappeared. He advanced quickly to the entrance. Drawing his flashlight from his pocket, he slid its catch forward and tossed it into the vault.

Slade bounded forward two seconds behind the electric torch that filled the crypt with a white light. His muscles were tense as he glanced about the silent, empty tombs. Staring at the black caskets lining the walls, he saw that now three shelves were empty. Dimly, beneath the shaft of light from the torch he perceived on the floor at the back two coffins beside the one he had examined in the morning. Their lids were lying near his feet.

"Cyrus Markham. 1845-1895," he read on the brass plate of one. The second was inscribed "Cyrus Markham. Born 1868. Died 1912. *Requiescat in Pace.*"

Slade edged forward noiselessly. He peered into one of the lidless coffins. With a sharp intake of breath he saw a skeleton glowing with a strange iridescence. From the large eye-sockets came a greenish luminousness. The entire skull seemed to radiate an eerie light. Its jagged teeth formed a lipless mouth that grinned at him with hideous mockery.

Inside the coffin Slade heard the faint sound of a hiss—the liquid sibilance of a snake.

He leaned closer. A jet of yellow vapor shot upwards and licked across his face.

He was conscious of the smell of decayed fruit. An odor of something rank, putrid, filled his nostrils. The skull appeared to grow smaller—to shrivel until it was about the size of an apple.

No, it was not that the skull was shrinking, he thought, it was getting farther away. The whole coffin seemed to him to be sinking down into the ground.

Slade forced his fingernails into the palms of his hand. He was faintly aware of pain—or the sickening scent of decay. His knees suddenly buckled.

He fell senseless on the cement floor of the vault. . . .

A round, brilliant disc swirled before Slade's eyes. Slowly its motion diminished. It stood still. Its contour took the form of a luminous skull, with black eye-sockets. The dark patches grew greyer. The yellow skull rounded into a disc again. Slowly it turned white.

Slade's eyes blinked open. He stared with dawning comprehension at the full moon that shone through the doorway of the Markham vault.

He got to his feet, uneasily. Sharp pains zigzagged through his head. His mind cleared slowly. He reeled toward the coffin. It contained the crushed and disordered bones of a skeleton. On the floor were the pieces of a broken crucifix.

He staggered out into the open and filled his lungs with the clean night air. Then his body stiffened with a sudden shock.

The prone figure of a man lay across the path leading to Serpentine Drive. Slade walked toward it. He knelt down and rolled the body onto its back. The sightless eyes of Jeff Briggs stared at him. The back of his head had been split with a cleaver, making a grisly sight in the night.

"SERGEANT STORM SLADE speaking. Yes, captain. No, sir. I couldn't call before. Captain, Jeff Briggs, the caretaker at Longwood, has been murdered. . . . Yes, murdered. His head's been split open. In front of the Markham vault. I'm talking from the cemetery lodge. Yes, sir. I'm beating it for Miss Dale Markham's. Going to look over the old Markham place. Thanks, captain."

Slade hooked the receiver to the telephone box. He glanced at the big face of the clock ticking metallically on the wall. Twelve forty-five.

The green roadster roared up the Merrick Road.

Dale Markham swung open the door of the tenant cottage. "I had half an idea you'd be back, Mr.

Storm Slade," she said. "Besides I'm a nighthawk. Come in."

Under the hall light she looked at him intently.

"Go in there and sit down," she directed, motioning toward the living room. "I'll be with you directly."

A moment later she returned and put a tumbler with two inches of brandy into Slade's hand.

"Swallow that," she smiled. "You look like a ghost. Then tell me what's happened."

Slade gulped the brandy. "Plenty," he said. "I'm going into the big house. Want you to give me the layout. I'd rather your tenant didn't know that I'm curious."

"Tenants," she corrected. "There are two of them—brothers."

"How many servants?"

"None. That's the curious part of it. A huge place like that and no servants. At least not for the past two weeks. They kept three of our old retainers for two and a half months and then suddenly dismissed them."

"You've lived in the house all your life?"

"Yes, of course."

"What's the easiest way to get in without making a noise?"

"Through the basement window that's used as a coal chute. It's always open," Dale smiled. "Brings back childhood memories. Just what do you expect to find?"

"The man who heaved the cleaver at me headed in that direction after he grabbed the Bible from you. I was too dumb to get the connection until I came to after a sniff of poison gas tonight. Two more caskets have been burst open. All three contained the remains of Cyrus Markhams. No Aaron coffins have been touched. Your tenants have found something in the old home that gives them an ungodly urge to get into a Cyrus Markham casket. But they didn't know which one. They stole the family Bible hoping to find out. I figure they got the right one tonight."

Dale was tense. "Go on," she said, "what makes you think so?"

"You told me all the Markhams were buried with a crucifix. Well, the pieces of two of them are on the floor of the vault. The third crucifix has vanished. So I'm paying a quiet visit to the big house."

Dale Markham was on her feet, her blue eyes fixed on Slade.

"You'd get lost in there," she said. "And I could walk around the old ramshackle, blindfolded."

She crossed the room rapidly to a desk, and, thrusting her hand into the drawer, pulled out a revolver. Then she went to the couch and picked up Slade's Colt.

"You may need your gun," she said, holding it toward him. "I'm coming with you, Mr. Storm Slade."

IN silence they approached the ancient Markham house. It was three stories high and rambled out in two wings. It bulked enormous against the moonlit sky.

"Up there, where you see the light on the second floor—" Dale whispered, "that's the upstairs sitting room. The light in the north wing on the ground floor comes from the library."

They made a wide circle through a grove of trees to the back of the house. Dale pointed to a small window flush with the ground.

"It swings out by hinges on the top. Eight feet to the cellar floor." Her voice was scarcely audible.

Slade quietly swung the window up. A shaft of light from his torch momentarily lit up the black interior of a coal bin. Then he slowly lowered himself into the darkness. A moment later he caught Dale in his arms and lowered her to her feet as she slid through the window. With the aid of the flashlight they passed noiselessly through several passageways to a flight of stone steps.

"Better put it out here," Slade heard the words whispered close to his ear.

"I can find the way perfectly in the dark."

She gripped his hand tightly.

Slade counted twelve steps as they crept upward in the dark. He felt a draft of warm dry air, and knew she must have opened a door. The damp chill of the cellar was gone. She guided him unerringly through several rooms. He was now aware of soft carpets beneath his feet. He felt her breath against his cheek.

"Beyond the door," she said softly, "is a hall that leads to the library where we saw the light."

A long slit of dim light told him that she was slowly opening the door. The slit grew broader. He could see a glow of light coming from a room twenty paces ahead.

"I'll go first, now," he whispered and pressed her gently behind him.

With infinite caution they moved down the hall to the library door. From somewhere above came a faint sound of voices.

Suddenly Slade felt Dale's fingers grip his arm convulsively.

On the library table was a hideous skull. It stared at them fantastically with a devilish, twisted grin.

Slade glanced at Dale.

She shook her head. "Not the skull," she said. "The book beside it. The family Bible."

"Look," said Slade hoarsely. "What's that?" He indicated with the barrel of his gun an open panel in the walnut wainscoating.

Dale looked at him with excited eyes.

"Didn't know it opened," she murmured.

Slade crossed the room and thrust his hand into the opening. He returned to the light of the lamp with a packet of letters. The envelopes were of a faded lavender color, undated, unstamped. On the table were two sheets of the same colored paper.

"These are what they've been interested in," he said, picking up one of the two open letters.

Together they read:

Cyrus, my beloved,

You will understand, I know, when you think of the perfection of our love why I am returning the diamonds to you. You tell me that you have not long to live, that the cancerous growth is spreading. My beloved, it wrings my heart to read the words, and to think of your last solicitude for me. But what comfort would such a fortune as they represent be to me after you are gone? No, Cyrus, I have reached an age when, if you go, I shall mercifully follow before long.

If you are determined to leave nothing to your son or to your wife, because of her unfaithfulness, then turn this wealth to some good purpose.

I think you are wrong, Cyrus, to suspect that Aaron is not your son; his face too closely resembles your own dear features.

May our souls be joined at last in heaven.

Devotedly,

T.

"There's no date or signature. That's why they couldn't tell which Cyrus it's written to," Dale whispered.

"Doesn't help us much, either," Slade agreed. "But look. This one mentions the crucifix."

They bent over the second letter:

Cyrus, loved one, I accept as unalterable your decision to carry your riches to the grave rather than let them pass to those you believe have betrayed you. Grant then this, my last plea. If Aaron is not of your blood, at least he is guiltless of the sin. Leave him at least his name and the home he was born in and loves so dearly.

As you asked, I am sending you the silver crucifix. You know well the secret spring at the bottom. Let the diamonds be buried in it with you. Then perhaps some day the Lord, in His wisdom, will turn them to some good.

Good night, my beloved.

T.

As Slade and Dale finished reading they realized that the voices from above had become more audible. He dropped the letters on the table and looked with fascination at the skull.

"So they knew the diamonds were in one of the caskets, and they just had to arrange to have time to find out which," said Slade slowly. "The killer rigged himself up like a skeleton, figuring that if he was disturbed while looting the vault he could hide in a

casket. Then he knew if anyone got too close, and discovered the fake, he could knock him out with poison gas."

"After their experience with Dr. Gilmore they decided to take some precautions," Dale suggested.

"Yes, it wasn't schoolboy clap-trap to frighten anyone. They had a deadly, calculated purpose. But it's come back on them like a boomerang. We know now who the killers are."

"Listen!"

Voices from the upper floor rose to a high pitch of anger.

"I'm going up," said Slade.

TWO minutes later he stood before a heavy oak door. He was conscious of Dale's presence close behind him. From beyond the door came the snarling voices of two men.

"You're lying, George. You can't put that over on me. When we got the Bible we knew damn well which Cyrus it was, because he had only one son."

"The crucifix was like the other two, I tell you. Do you think I'd double-cross you?"

"You're lying, I tell you, because there were only two broken crucifixes on the floor of the vault, when I got there."

"You'd no business coming to the vault. Your job was to stick to the car and keep the motor running."

"Don't be an ass. If I had, where'd you be? The caretaker would have set up a great holler. And who thought of the skeleton suit, and the poison gas? Without them, we'd both be in the jug by now."

"Oh, so that's why you're so cocky! Just because you screwed up enough nerve to use a cleaver on him. I handled that long-nosed detective all right. What trouble do you suppose I'd have had with an old man like the caretaker? You try minding your own business for a change."

"You bet I will, I'll just—"

"Stay where you are!"

"Sure, you might as well come clean, George, I saw you through the win-

dow. I was standing on the veranda outside."

"Keep away from that desk."

"George, you fool. Don't pull a gun on me."

"Keep away, I tell you."

"To hell with you. I've stood your cheating long enough, you thief. Now I'm going to take what's—"

The muffled report of a gun came through the door. Then there was silence. Slade slowly turned the knob, pressing his shoulder against the oak panel. The door was locked. His hand tightened around the butt of his gun as he leveled its nose even with the lock.

"Listen," Dale whispered. "The back steps. You can get the drop on him that way. They lead up from the pantry we came through, at the end of the hall below."

Slade pointed at a dark doorway behind him.

"Duck in there," he said. "I'll sneak around that other way."

Before she could answer, Slade was gone. He glided down the stairs and along the lower hall silently. He cat-footed across the pantry and found the back steps. There he paused. From above came the sound of heavy faltering footsteps.

Slade swung onto the bottom step and waited, gun cocked. The shuffling steps came nearer. Then he saw the glowing bones of a skeleton on the landing above.

A blue flame shot from Slade's gun. It revealed for a split-second a black mass hurtling through the air. As Slade ducked, the full force of a human body struck him. He was thrown back violently on the floor. He lay for a moment stunned. A lifeless body sprawled across his chest. The lights flashed on. He shoved the dead weight of the corpse off him, and got to his feet.

A GUN was aimed at Slade's head. Before him stood a man clothed in skin-tight black jersey. On it was sewn lustrous metallic cloth, smeared

with radium paint. Even in the full glare of the light there was the weird delusion of a luminous skeleton. But the face that stared at him from behind the gun was even more unearthly than the phantom skeleton. Colorless eyes glistened at him diabolically.

"So, so, it's you," Slade heard a voice saying, although the creature's lips didn't seem to move. "Stupid. Yes, stupid of me. You didn't breathe quite enough of the putrescine gas earlier this evening. Oh well, it's little more trouble to cremate two than one, since the furnace is of ample size to accommodate both of you."

The man laughed insanely as he advanced toward Slade.

"In fact," he cackled, "it will be less trouble, for you will carry John's body down to the boiler room. Quite. Quite so. Now pick up the baggage and start."

Slade stood motionless, staring into the eyes of the man before him who held a gun aimed with deadly accuracy at his head.

"Go on," the man snarled, "or I'll bore a hole through your skull."

Slade glanced at his gun lying on the floor six feet away. He was gauging the chances of lunging for it.

"You move toward that gun," said the voice, "and you're dead. You pick up that body or I blow a piece out of your head right here."

Slade was looking into the barrel of the gun when the crack of an automatic split the silence. Blood spurted from the man's wrist as his gun clattered to the floor. With a yell of rage he wheeled and bounded up the stairs. In the doorway stood Dale Markham, white-faced, a smoking pistol in her hand.

Slade snatched his gun from the floor and scaled the steps, three at a stride. He raced along the upper hall, following the fleeting form. There was a streak of flame ahead and a bullet scorched his cheek.

Slade's gun flashed and was answered by a scream of pain. The door at the end of the hall splintered with

the crashing of broken glass. On the veranda a black figure doubled convulsively at the waist, spun around, staggered backward, and plunged over the railing.

On the cement driveway below, Slade saw the motionless body of the murderer.

He found Dale Markham in the room behind the oak door. He crossed to the desk and pulled the drawer open. Together they looked upon the glittering mass of the Markham diamonds.

Dale's eyes shone with wonder.

"How beautiful, how perfectly beautiful," she murmured.

Storm looked down at the strong, pure profile of the girl beside him.

"They're yours, you know," he said softly. "I think you'll be able to find a use for them, won't you?"

"Do you remember the closing of the second letter to old Cyrus?" she asked. "Perhaps some day the Lord, in his wisdom, will turn them to some good.' I feel as if I were part of a prophecy—and as if you were, too. Even the murders they have caused will in some way be atoned for, I think, by the lives that they will save."

"The cancer cure?" asked Slade.

Dale nodded silently.



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Slaughter Epidemic

By Leon Dupont

Author of "Satan's Springboard," etc.



A scalpel is the sort of thing you'd expect in a doctor's office. But the suspicious man received a knife—in a fatal thrust. And when the doctor got shot in the shoulder for his pains, Detective Gerry Evans had to find a cure for the slaughter epidemic.

LISTEN carefully, Evans," Captain Hart of the night detail told the broad-shouldered man before him. "I've just had a telephone call that may amount to something important. Remember the Max-on Jewelry Store robbery last week?"

"I was on it, captain," Gerry Evans told him. "Lieutenant Firth sent me there with the squad. One of the guys that pulled it was shot."

"Good!" Hart said. "The phone call

I just received was from Doctor Lasher on West End Avenue. He says two days ago a man came into his office with a bullet hole in his right shoulder. It had been there for a couple of days and looked bad. Doc dressed it and then questioned the man, but he only got threats in answer. He told the man to come back today and he's there now.

"The doctor doesn't want anything to do with him and is afraid to ques-

tion him. Beat it down there, go in the back way—the doc will be looking for you—and pick that bird up. Let the doc dress the wound if he thinks it's necessary, and then bring him back here. I've just got a hunch he's the bird that was shot at the jewelry store break."

Gerry Evans nodded and hastened for the car that was waiting at the curb. He gave his orders to the driver with an added word to step on it, and in ten minutes the car pulled up to the curb just south of Dr. Lasher's office. Evans vaulted out of the car, skirted the outside of Lasher's office and made his way into the back yard. Dr. Lasher had his office in his home.

There was a side entrance for his patients and a rear exit. It was at this rear door that Evans saw the doctor. He was clad in a regulation laboratory cloak and he was plainly nervous.

"You—are the police?" he whispered.

"Yes," Gerry answered. "Is he still inside?"

"He is there. I shall call him into my office now and when he comes the rest is up to you."

Gerry entered the elaborately furnished office. He looked about inquiringly at the two doors in the room.

"He is out there," Lasher told him and indicated the further door.

"He thinks I have a patient in here now. Shall I call him?"

"Go ahead," Gerry said and he took up a position where the opening door would conceal him. His right hand was tightened about the butt of his gun.

Dr. Lasher opened the door hesitatingly and stuck his head into the waiting room.

"All right," he called. Gerry stiffened, his gun was half drawn and he held his breath.

A MINUTE passed and he heard nothing more. He could see the doctor gazing into the waiting room

and then he heard a grunt. He stepped from his hiding place, gun in hand now, and stepped into the other room.

The doctor was bent over a man who sat stiffly in the center of a bench that formed part of the doctor's waiting room furniture. A smoking cigarette dangled from between his fingers and Gerry could smell the odor of singed flesh. He stepped to the doctor's side.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "Did he pass out?"

"I—I don't know," Lasher gulped. "Something has happened to him. Wait!"

He ran an expert hand beneath the man's shirt. An instant he held it there and when he removed it, he uttered an exclamation. He held the hand so that Gerry could see the crimson that stained it.

"This man is dead," Lasher told him in a strained voice. "He—he has been stabbed—somehow."

But Gerry hadn't waited for the words. His keen eyes had observed the strange position of the body. It flashed through his mind instantly that dead men do not sit in a sagging position. Something held this man up. It took Gerry a second to find it. Dr. Lasher's bench was of wood. Its back was composed of carved pieces set about two inches apart. Through one of these spaces the handle of a knife gleamed dully.

"Look!" The detective said. "He was stabbed through the back and the knife is holding the body up. Makes him look as if he was asleep or sick. How long has he been here?"

"About," Lasher consulted his wrist watch, "half an hour. I telephoned you just after he came in."

"Were any other patients in the room with him?" Gerry persisted.

"Why, yes, Mrs. Fisher was there, and a man whose name I don't know. It was his first visit."

"Don't know him, eh?" Gerry said. "Is he coming again?"

"Why, no," Lasher seemed to be thinking. "As a matter of fact there

wasn't anything I could do for him. He complained of stomach pains, but I couldn't diagnose anything without extended observation so I told him to enter a hospital for a few days. He was in my office about five minutes. He came in right after Mrs. Fisher."

"You'd know him again if you saw him?" Gerry wanted to know.

"Of course," Lasher retorted. "A doctor looks at a patient closely, you know. Why? You—you don't think—"

"Who else could have killed him?" Gerry said. "Now where's a phone? I've got plenty to do."

He left the doctor still examining the body and hurried into the inner office. He called headquarters, gave them a brief outline of what had happened, and asked for help. He replaced the receiver and began to wipe his brow.

Suddenly the bark of a heavy gun almost knocked him over. He whipped his own weapon into firing position and waited.

"Are you there, doctor?" he called. A groan answered him and then a door slammed. Gerry raced for the waiting room. He saw the white-clad doctor lying in agony on the floor. Blood ran from a wound in his shoulder. The dead man still sat stiffly, his head hanging so that his chin rested against his chest—a silent witness.

"What happened?" Gerry asked as he knelt by the wounded man.

"Some—some one, a man—I think—opened the door while I was making my examination of—him," he inclined his head weakly toward the dead man. "I started to tell the man I couldn't see him tonight when he suddenly raised a gun and shot me. He aimed for my heart and I moved just in time."

Lasher staggered to his feet. He seated himself in one of the chairs and nodded approvingly while Gerry began to rip away the white coat. The shirt lay beneath and Gerry tore this ruthlessly until he came to the wound. Doctor Lasher paled slightly at the

blood and the pain. Then he shook himself.

"In my office," he said, "bottom drawer, there is a bottle of whiskey. Give me—a—little. I—feel—" he ended his words as he sagged forward in a faint.

Gerry found the bottle and poured a generous quantity down the doctor's throat. He held the bottle to the light a moment and then took a healthy swig himself. Lasher shuddered as he began to come out of his faint. Gerry could hear the squeal of brakes outside now. He assisted Lasher to his feet and half carried him into the office.

"I—I'll be all right now," Lasher said weakly, "foolish of me to go like that."

Gerry had no time to answer. The house was flooded with men in a moment. Captain Hart strode into the room and sat down heavily. He had seen the body in the waiting room. Now he looked in surprise at the blood-soaked doctor.

"Well " he turned to Gerry. "What happened?"

Gerry told him. Hart listened, then turned to Lasher.

"What did the man with the supposed stomach trouble look like?"

"He was quite ordinary in appearance. He had a slight scar over his left eye, and his nose seemed to have been broken but cleverly repaired. It would take a doctor to notice it. He was about five feet seven and was stocky. His hair, I think, was black. He looked like a foreigner, but he spoke good enough English."

"Mrs. Fisher, the woman that was in your waiting room, could identify him, too?"

"I don't know that, of course. Mrs. Fisher has been one of my patients for years, a sober, serious-minded woman. Very probably she did notice the man."

"Gerry," Hart ordered, "go up to Mrs. Fisher's. See how her description tallies with Dr. Lasher's."

GERRY obtained the address of Mrs. Fisher from Dr. Lasher and a car took him there in less than ten minutes. He pushed the bell under which was an engraved, clearly expensive card. The apartment lobby was ornate, too. Mrs. Fisher must have been a profitable patient.

A maid escorted him into a cozy study. Minutes later Mrs. Fisher came in. She was wrapped in an expensive robe. Her rather pretty face was free from all powder and paint. Gerry thought to himself she looked better this way than smeared with grease and paint. She looked at him quizzically.

"You are—a detective?" she asked. "What do you want with me?"

"I'm sorry to bother you," Gerry told her. "But you were in Dr. Lasher's office earlier this evening. There were two men in the waiting room with you. One was seated on a bench in the northwest corner of the room. I don't know where the other was sitting, but I'd like to get a description of him."

"A description of him?" Mrs. Fisher was aghast. "Why, young man, I don't go about gazing at people. I remember a man was there, the one who sat on the bench too, but I didn't pay much attention to them. The man on the bench did act as though he were intoxicated. I do recall that."

"You mean he sagged forward?" Gerry was surprised, but he kept it to himself. Mrs. Fisher had gone into the consulting room first. It was after she had gone that Gerry was sure the man had been murdered. If he were dead before she left the waiting room, it would complicate matters. Then the stranger might not have been to blame.

"Yes," she thought a moment. "I believed he was ill, at first, and I was going to suggest he see the doctor first. What happened anyway? Why did you come here?"

"You didn't notice the other man?" Gerry disregarded her question for the moment.

"Well, yes, after a fashion. He was ordinary looking. He must have been five feet seven and he was rather stout. I think he had a blue suit on and a gray coat. Did he do anything?"

"We don't know yet," Gerry told her. There was a new thought seeping into his mind. He tried to shrug it off, but it stuck with him. He decided to tell the woman everything.

"The man who was seated on the bench is dead," he said. "Murdered."

"Oh!" She seemed incapable of further speech. Her hand was thrust against her throat, and she was very pale.

"Not only that," Gerry decided to fire another bomb. "Dr. Lasher was almost murdered. Some one shot him, and we think perhaps it might have been this other man. Could you identify him, Mrs. Fisher? We'll probably pick him up in a few days and we'll need your help then. Did you notice any peculiar facts about him—something that would impress him on your mind?"

"Is—is Dr. Lasher all right?" she asked, paying no attention to questions. "Did—did they—kill him?"

"No, Mrs. Fisher. Just a slight flesh wound, that's all. Now about this man again. You would be willing to help us, wouldn't you?"

"If he injured Dr. Lasher in any way, I'll do all I can. Now let me think—there was something about him that I sort of recall. He had a scar on his face—that was all. Just a little one, but the light caught it just right when he looked at me and I saw it. His nose looked funny too, as if it had been hurt. I wouldn't have wanted to meet that man alone on a dark street, I can tell you. He didn't look right to me and if he tried to hurt poor Dr. Lasher—and killed a man, too—"

"Then I'll be back," Gerry told her. Her surprise over, she had wound herself up for a long talk. He didn't have time for that. He had learned all he wished to know.

"And if you see a couple of men

following you about, don't be frightened," he added. "We'll place you under guard for a couple of days, just in case."

"You mean—perhaps they might try to murder me too?" she asked weakly.

"Oh no," Gerry hastened to assure her, "but we like to protect people who help us. They won't bother you, I'm sure."

She thanked him as he bowed his way out the door. Quickly he made his way down the stairs. The squad car awaited him, motor idling.

Gerry talked earnestly to the driver for a moment and then gave crisp orders.

"Maxon's Jewelry Store," he said, "and hurry."

THE car, siren screaming, wended its way through the traffic. The driver cut down on the siren as they turned into Dean Street. No use having a thousand people following. There had been one huge crowd at Maxon's already.

An elderly man, dressed in a well-fitted cutaway, came to meet him. His face lighted up in recognition. Maxon's was a nationally known store. People came there from over the whole world, and Maxon's remained open until late. It was that fact that made it easier prey for daring hold-ups. The night lends a silent hand to thieves.

"You have learned something?" he asked in eager anticipation.

"Not yet," Gerry told him, "at least not much. You could, of course, identify some of the men who were here?"

"Those whom I saw—yes. The clerks would know others. You have found one of them?"

"I think so," Gerry told him, and then went on to describe in detail the dead man. Maxon's head clerk grew crimson in excitement as Gerry went along, but he made no attempt to stop him. But when Gerry had finished, he burst out impetuously.

"That's one of them," he cried. "He

killed Gourson, the clerk. I saw him laugh and then shoot him down. Gourson, with two children. You should have him hung quickly."

"No need to, Ross," he remembered this was the man's name. "He is dead already. All we want is an identification. Can you come along?"

"In a moment," and Ross sped to the back room to give orders and to don a topcoat.

Half an hour later he nodded silently as he looked down at the corpse.

"That is he," he told Gerry. "I saw him shoot down Gourson and now he is dead himself. Who killed him?"

"That," Gerry said, "is what we'd like to know."

They left the grisly room, and in the police car Gerry questioned the man further.

"You didn't see anything of a man about five feet seven, kind of fat and with a scar over his eye, in that bunch of holdup men, did you?"

"No," Ross pondered, "no, I'm sure I didn't. I looked at them as closely as I dared. If one had a scar over his eye, I should have observed it."

Gerry dropped him at his store and continued on to headquarters. By this time they would have left Dr. Lasher's. Captain Hart would be waiting, he knew.

And he was. Hart glared at him for a moment.

"Where the devil have you been?" he asked. "Mrs. Fisher must have been some dame."

Gerry laughed. "The dead one was in the mob that stuck up Maxon's," he told Hart. "I just had Maxon's head clerk at the morgue. He identified him in a second."

"Oh," Hart rounded his lips, "that's different. Did you ask him about the man that was in Lasher's office too?"

"He didn't know a thing about him. Mrs. Fisher remembered him though. Gave the same description as Lasher. You've sent an alarm for him, I suppose?"

"Uh, huh, and we've identified your dead man too. He's Mickey Laden, one

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of the North Square gang. I've thought all along they pulled that job. We're having 'em all picked up. One of 'em will crack about the break and he'll crack about this last murder too. Mickey's fingerprints were on file. It took just ten minutes to identify him."

"Too bad the guy that bumped him didn't leave any prints," Gerry sighed. "But how's Lasher coming along? Was he hurt bad?"

"No, the coroner's man fixed him up—put his arm in a sling after he cleaned the wound. It was just a flesh wound, but whoever took a shot at the doc sure tried to finish him. It was just six inches above the center of his heart that he was struck. Lasher laughs at it, says he won't worry. We've got a couple of men with him. We sent two out to Mrs. Fisher's too. I figured she'd be able to pick out the murderer. If he tried to get Lasher once, he might try again and this time he might pick on Mrs. Fisher as well. It's best to be careful."

Gerry shook his head slowly from side to side. The look in his eyes was far away.

"What do you mean?" Hart snapped at him. "Shaking your head that way. Don't you think he'll try again?"

"Nope!" And Gerry grinned. "I'll tell you about it later. I'm going to see Lasher."

"But—" Hart began and then sank back in his chair. "Damn," he muttered. But he knew Gerry. There was something up his sleeve and until he pulled it down Gerry could be made of stone for all the good questioning him would do.

GERRY opened the outer door of Lasher's waiting room, picked a chair opposite the bench on which the dead man had sat, and waited. He knew a buzzer on the outer door would warn Lasher some one was in the waiting room. Gerry had talked briefly with the two plainclothes men who guarded the house. They

were stationed at advantageous places.

The door of the consulting room opened and Lasher thrust his head out. "Sorry," he barked, "I can see no one today—oh, it is you—come in."

He held the door wide, and Gerry walked in. He sat down before Lasher's desk. The doctor regarded him queerly.

"There is something new?" he asked.

"Plenty," Gerry told him. "We know who the dead man was and we know who shot him and why. If we only knew who stabbed him in your office, now, that would be something."

"Yes," Lasher agreed complacently. "And what can I do?"

"Mrs. Fisher," Gerry said suddenly, "you can depend on her?"

"Of course," Lasher said. "Why?"

"Because she didn't tell the exact truth, doctor. She said the man with the scar over his eye went into your office before she did. That's not right, is it?"

"Why no," Lasher scowled. "I gave her more sense than that. She came in here first. Why, the man must have been murdered while she was in my office. I was engrossed in my work and that is probably why I didn't hear any noise out there."

"Yes," Gerry said flatly. "Well, guess I'll talk to Mrs. Fisher some more. Mind if I come back in half an hour? It's getting late."

"Come along," Lasher said. "I'm closing my office tomorrow and when this is all over I'm going away for awhile. I haven't had a vacation in years, and all this excitement has unnerved me. I can't do my work properly."

Gerry nodded in sympathy and walked out. He opened the outer door, stepped down the one stair, and then stopped suddenly. Quietly he stepped back in the room. Outside, one of the plainclothes men emerged from the shadows of the house. He thrust a hand forward and slammed the door shut. Then he walked down the short

path to the car. He clambered in. To all appearances Detective Gerry Evans was on his way to the home of Mrs. Fisher. The car pulled away from the curb and vanished in the night.

Gerry, still inside the waiting room, was hidden behind the big chair in which Mrs. Fisher had been seated. It covered his big frame completely. He drew a deep breath and waited. From behind the closed door he could hear Doctor Lasher walking up and down the floor. Muffled curses came to him. The doctor was talking to himself and in strong language. Suddenly he heard the click of the phone. He listened to what he could hear of the one-sided conversation.

"You fool!" Lasher's voice was irate. "You've spoiled the whole thing. That detective is on his way to see you now. You'll tell him you made a mistake when you talked with him tonight. You came into my office first—or else how in the devil's name could our scarred stranger murder Laden. A woman never could hold her tongue in the right place anyway. We'll have to get away now. The police aren't as dumb as they sometimes pretend to be. You'll have to shake the men guarding you. Meet me tomorrow—"

The rest of the conversation Gerry could not hear. Evidently Lasher had muffled this last, but it wasn't important anyway—after what he had already heard. Gerry loosened the gun in its holster. It was getting warm in the waiting room. He hoped Lasher would come out.

As if in answer to his wishes, the consultation room door opened. It closed again quickly to smother the light that came from it. Lasher knew two men were guarding him. He laughed sardonically now as he thought of it. Guarding him!

In the darkness, familiarity led him directly to the chair where Gerry waited with bursting lungs. He hadn't dared to breathe. The stillness of the room would have betrayed him to the

quick ears of the doctor in a moment. He felt Lasher rummage beneath the cushion of the chair. Slowly, Gerry reached out a hand. He could see the white cuff of Lasher's sleeve. His hand tightened on it and clung there, talonlike. He straightened up and twisted the wrist unmercifully.

He heard Lasher's grunts of astonishment and then he found the light switch. He pressed it and grinned into Lasher's face.

"So, doctor," he said smoothly, "you are going places—and with Mrs. Fisher, too. But what were you after here?"

HE was slowly shoving the doctor against the wall. Gerry wanted an opportunity to drape handcuffs on his wrists and he cursed himself for not having them ready. He sensed the danger that stood before him, but he wasn't quick enough to forestall the doctor. It suddenly occurred to him that Lasher's arm was no longer in a sling.

A revolver suddenly gleamed in his hand and was shoved in the pit of Gerry's stomach. Slowly he dropped his grip on the doctor, backed away a few steps, and raised his hands.

"Fool!" Lasher snarled. "Do you think you can outsmart me? From the moment I saw you, I knew I should have trouble with you. Well, it won't be much trouble. I'm going to kill you, copper."

"Go ahead and shoot," Gerry grinned. "The noise of that gat will bring more cops on you than you ever thought existed. That's the gun you plugged yourself with, isn't it?"

"What if it is?" Lasher countered. "You'll tell no one, but I'm grateful for that little tip. In return I'll permit you to die an easy death. Walk ahead of me into my consultation room. I'll be right in back of you. The slightest move and I'll fire. I can say I thought you were the murderer, you know. After all, I was supposed to think you left here for Harriet—Mrs. Fisher's."

Gerry's mind was whirling. He gave Dr. Lasher his just due. Lasher was clever. The plot Gerry had uncovered proved that. Lasher would murder him with no more compunction than a fly on the wall. He would have to act fast.

Lasher motioned him into a chair. Gun leveled, he reached a hand into a small drawer in his desk and drew forth a metal container. He opened it and expertly held up a hypodermic.

"Hydrocyanic acid," he told Gerry with a cruel smile. "It kills in less than one second. I've kept it here for myself—just in case. After you are dead, then I shall shoot you so that none can hear me. I shall leave you here as another mystery for your clever colleagues to solve. They'll never think of looking for poison."

He stretched his hand toward Gerry, syringe loaded with instantaneous death, ready for the plunge into Gerry's arm. There was only one chance.

"You wouldn't want to die, doctor?" he said suddenly.

Lasher paused. "I die?" he laughed. "You are the one, my man. Some day—perhaps—I, but now—"

"You know only one man went away in that car, doctor," Gerry reminded him. He raised his voice and looked over Lasher's shoulder.

"Shoot him in the stomach," he called loudly, "don't kill him, just make him suffer."

"You think you can fool me like that?" Lasher laughed loudly. He did not move his head, but Gerry noticed that the hand holding the syringe was shaking slightly. He began again.

"I'll just nod my head, Jimmy," he said. "When I do that, pull the trigger. Ready?"

Lasher gulped. He dared not move his eyes from Gerry. Yet, something told him death stared directly at his back. The thoughts of hot lead coursing its way through his stomach made him reel slightly. The pain of that flesh wound in his shoulder had been enough.

Suddenly he thought he heard a slight noise behind his back. He made ready to whirl about and then thought better of it. He scowled darkly and half rose from his chair. The needle was ready for its ghastly work now.

"Why doesn't the man behind me answer you, copper?" Lasher gloated. "Why? Because there isn't any one there, that's why. Now you are going to die!"

Gerry raised his head high. He looked directly over Lasher's shoulder and suddenly brought his head down. It started to be a short, emphatic nod, but it ended in a doubling up of Gerry's body. At the same instant he shot like a bullet from the chair. His head caught Lasher full in the stomach and sent him staggering against the wall.

Gerry grabbed the chair in which he had been seated. Lasher raised his gun, but Gerry hurled the heavy piece of furniture across the room. His aim was true. It sent Lasher's gun flying from his grasp. Then Gerry charged. His eyes did not see the hypodermic. They saw only an evil, red-eyed, madman waiting for him. His right hand gripped Lasher's wrist and kept the needle away. The two men went into a squirming heap on the floor. Gerry gasped for breath.

Lasher was a fighter. There was hidden strength behind those slender arms, and now he fought with the fury of the damned. The injured shoulder impeded him not at all. He tried to shove his knuckles into Gerry's eyes, but a lusty kick in the midriff stopped that. He was almost out of breath now.

There was only one way. Slowly he began to move the syringe into position for a death stab. Gerry felt him and tightened his grip on Lasher's throat. It was only when he felt the needle as it struck his skin that he let go. His two arms shoved hard at Lasher's body. The doctor, on one knee, lost his balance and fell to one side.

A blood-curdling scream greeted

Gerry's ears, and then he saw the body of Lasher suddenly grow still. One hand was doubled against his chest. In it was the hypodermic, tightly clasped. The needle was deep in the flesh.

Gerry rose and staggered to the nearest upright chair. He reached for the phone and gave short directions to the desk man.

IT was an hour later when he felt well enough to talk. Hart sat beside him. His face was set in expectancy.

"We got the woman," he told Gerry. "She was just getting ready to blow. She had the stuff, too—a quarter of a million dollars' worth of it. Maxon's have a reward out for the stuff. It's yours, I guess—if the commissioners see fit to let you have it. But how did you get wise, boy?"

Gerry grinned. He leaned back in the swivel chair that had been Lasher's and sighed deeply.

"It looked all right," he said, "until the dame—Mrs. Fisher—began to describe the guy that was supposed to have bumped Mickey Laden. Lasher must have told her what to say, and she said it all right. Her description was exactly like Lasher's. Every little detail. Even to a busted nose that Lasher said only a doctor could notice and that Mrs. Fisher said she saw right away.

"I smelled a rat then. The guy with the scar didn't exist. Lasher killed Mickey Laden, lugged him into the

waiting room, and fastened him upright with the knife. He wanted me to be with him when Mickey was found. Mrs. Fisher beat it with the stuff, and the stage was set."

"Lasher was in on the holdup, too?" Hart queried.

"No," Gerry told him. "Not as I see it, and Mrs. Fisher will probably verify this. Mickey Laden was shot during the holdup. He heard Lasher fixed up guys like that and said nothing, so he came here. Lasher must have told him he could get rid of the stuff or something.

"Anyway, Mickey brought the whole business down here. The rest of the gang must have trusted him plenty to let him do it, or else Mickey had the stuff cached himself. When Lasher saw it, he couldn't resist. He bumped Mickey and then, while I was here, he shot himself in the shoulder. He let the gun fall under the cushion of one of the chairs in his waiting room. He told me the guy that plugged him ran out the front door.

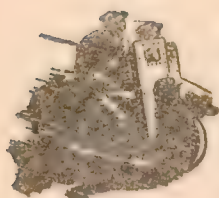
"But he must have been kind of excited or something. He pulled a boner there. You see, I came here in a squad car. The driver was sitting in the car and he could see Lasher's door. He told me he hadn't seen even a shadow run out of the door after he heard the shot. That set me thinking, but when the dame came across with the same description, even the little details that a woman would never notice, then I knew Lasher was mixed up in it."



Vengeance turns the tables on a

Plunder Pact

By Joseph Dennis



SNAPPER LUND, sallow, bony face alight with an exultant smirk, stood on guard just inside the office door of the Harcross Sheet & Tube Company. The door was slightly ajar. Outside, at the end of a dark hallway, was slumped the figure of the night watchman. Snapper had cracked down on the man's head with a heavy blackjack.

Chuckling, Snapper kept his eyes peeled. So far, the job had been a cinch. From a room just off the main office came tiny sounds as educated and dexterous fingers swiftly souped the edge of the big steel safe. Snapper Lund shifted his gun from one hand to the other and visualized the riotous life he would lead once he had seventy grand in his pocket.

Everything had been planned to the last detail. For days Snapper Lund had haunted the vicinity of this great brick building, learning through various channels that the payroll of the Harcross Company always arrived at the office on the afternoon preceding payday, remained overnight in the custody of a night watchman. The fact that a copper from a protective association also haunted the neighborhood was of little concern to Snapper. He had a gun and he was commanding the entrance to the office. If the copper showed up Snapper would let him have it. A block away in an alley a car was waiting, engine purring.

Suddenly Snapper jerked his head around as a hoarse whisper cut the

silence. "It's ready to blow, Snapper. Shut the door!"

"Okay," Snapper grinned, "an' it's thunderin' outside, too. Listen to it, Grubb. I even picked the weather."

Grubb grinned and shut the door behind him. Outside a driving rain began to pelt down. Wind shrieked and rattled the window sashes. The sound of a muffled explosion beyond the door was dulled by a terrific detonation from the heavens.

"That does it!" Grubb cracked and yanked the door open. Curls of acrid smoke seeped into the outer office. Snapper followed his accomplice inside. He played his flash upon the ruin. The safe yawned open. Immediately avid fingers were clawing at a canvas bag on which were stenciled the letters FARMERS & MECHANICS BANK.

"Come on, Grubb, we're lammin'!" Snapper ripped out. "This is the works."

Grubb clutched Snapper's arm as they hurried out into the musty corridor.

"Remember, Snapper," the safe-cracker snarled, "no shootin'. Nobody ever gets away with it."

"Shut up!" Snapper countered, voice strident. "I'm handlin' this job, Grubb. I got you in from St. Louis when I could've called in a dozen guys in this town."

"Oh, yeah?" Grubb flung back as they crouched momentarily in the doorway of the brick building. "You knew there wasn't a better guy no place, Snapper Lund. There ain't nothin' I don't know about this racket."

However, there was one thing Grubb did not know. Snapper Lund was a double-crosser.

A FLASH of lightning lighted up the street. The rain was still falling in sheets. Snapper Lund leaped out of the doorway when darkness again enveloped everything.

Above the fury of the storm sounded a steely voice. "Stop where you are, you—"

A gun boomed. The bullet whined close to Snapper Lund's head and pinged off a lamp post. Snapper whirled, a gun in his fist. Lightning flashed again. Bathed in its glare was a man in the gray uniform of a protective association. He was crouched against the side of the building the robbers had left. Snapper fired. The man jerked, crumpled onto the wet concrete and lay still.

"Damn you!" Grubb ripped out.

"Shut your trap an' run, Grubb," the murderer lashed out. "Once we grab that car nothin' stops us." He threw the gun he had fired into an ashcan standing at the curb.

The two men dashed into the alley, leaped into the car waiting for them. The car tore out into the street a block away from where the policeman lay sprawled.

The gray-clad man pulled himself to his hands and knees. His eyes, dimming, just made out the rear of the car as it swung out of the alley and raced down the street. He swung his gun up, fired until his fingers became nerveless.

On the other side of town Snapper Lund drove the car into a small galvanized-iron garage in the rear of the house where he kept his quarters. He got out and shut the garage doors.

"We stay here, Grubb," he began. "I got it all figgered out. I got another set of license plates to put on this bus."

"It's a good thing you have, Snapper," growled the safe-cracker. "That cop was shootin' at us when we got out

of the alley. If he seen them plates we got on—"

"We stay here for an hour or so," Lund said. "Like I planned. Then we head for the main highway to Bransford. This bus is black. In a night like this nobody could be sure whether it was blue or not, see? We stay hid out in Bransford in some hick farmhouse that takes tourists until the next mornin'. Then we start for Chi, grab a rattler there and head for the Coast, maybe South America." Snapper Lund laughed icily and reached into the back seat of the car. He drew out a bottle.

"Have a drink, Grubb," he said.

"You said it!" grinned his companion and tipped the bottle to his lips.

Snapper said, "Put it down on the runnin' board. I'll take a hooker in a minute. I want to git a look at that dough."

"Seventy grand, huh?" breathed Grubb, eyes glistening. "Thirty-five grand split. What a haul!"

"Yeah," Snapper gritted. "Sure." He ripped open the canvas bag and pulled out a big bunch of bills. "Ain't new stuff neither," he declared. "Can't be traced. Have another drink, Grubb."

Despite their comparative security Grubb seemed shaken. Time lagged. Finally Grubb clutched at the bottle and gulped more fiery liquor.

"If you killed that copper," he said, passing a hand over his eyes. "Boy, that stuff's got a kick!"

"Losin' your nerve, Grubb?"

"Huh?" Grubb retorted. "I-I'll show you, Snapper! Losin' my—nerve—huh? For thirty-five grand—"

Snapper Lund laughed mockingly as Grubb's head dropped suddenly. The man straightened with an effort, looked at Lund dully. In the leaden hue of his deep-set eyes was a suspicious gleam.

"Y-you rat!" he screamed. "That whisky—you—" His head dropped. Chin on his chest, he tried to grope for Lund. From a long distance away, it seemed to Grubb, came Lund's taunting voice:

"Split seventy grand, huh?" it was saying. "Not me. Yeah, I got more license plates, Grubb. I got another car I'm lammin' out in. There was two knockout drops in that booze. I don't need you no more. You'll go to sleep pretty. I'm gonna leave the car runnin' when I go out an' lock the door. When they find you, they'll think you fell down on somethin' an' knocked yourself out. Then the gas from the exhaust will put you where you can't foller me. Me—split—"

Grubb, on legs that seemed to have turned to kite tails, strove to reach the mocking hazy figure of Lund. The lightning outside flashed as Grubb's knees caved in.

WITH his face twisted in unholy mirth, Snapper Lund dragged Grubb to the side of the car, laid him down on the floor so that his head rested against a heavy iron tire rim. He lifted the head and cracked it down against the heavy metal. Then Lund, laughing crazily, got into the car, started the engine. He clambered out of the car and hurried to the garage doors.

As the doors slammed shut behind him, Snapper Lund broke into a run. The money was tucked under his arm. Ten minutes later he drove a roadster out of an old shed that squatted in one corner of a junkyard and headed to the main highway to Bransford.

About one o'clock in the morning, with the rain still beating down, Snapper Lund drove his car up to a farmhouse over the door of which was a sign creaking and gyrating in the wind. He knocked on the door and in a short time an elderly man answered.

"Been drivin' in the storm," Snapper grinned. "Tried to get through but got tired. How 'bout a place to flop?"

"Put your car in the barn," the man said. "Then I'll show you a room. Dol-

lar for tonight an' fifty cents for breakfast."

It was just daylight when Snapper awoke. He sat straight up in bed, a tingling sensation coursing up his spine. His sleep-drugged eyes stared out of the window. The storm was over and the sky was pink. A knock came on the door. That was what had awakened him then. The old guy had been getting him out.

"Thinks I'm a hick, huh?" Lund growled as he swung out of bed. "Thinks I'm gonna get up this early, does he? I'll show the old skunk." He crossed the room in his bare feet, turned the rusty key in the lock and swung the door open. Snapper Lund's face whitened and he uttered a shriek of rage and terror as he tried to slam the door shut. But a hand was pushing the door in and another hand was holding a gun.

"Gr-rubb!" the fear-ridden crook jerked out. "Y-you—" Two state troopers had crowded Grubb in, each wielding a gun.

"Yeah," the crook grinned. "They grabbed me tryin' to steal a car, Snapper. I was comin' for you. You see I knew all your plans. There's only two tourist joints in Bransford. That cop you killed, Snapper, fired low at the car when we was pullin' out. It got the gas tank close to the bottom. The gas leaked out, Snapper, an' the car stopped runnin'. We used a lot when we kept it runnin' in the alley, too. That's why I'm here." Grubb laughed metallically. "I know where his gun is, coppers, the one he used to bump off the bull back in town. The dough's here somewhere. Everybody knows I never pack no guns."

"Y-you dirty rat!" Snapper Lund screeched.

"I get five years," Grubb said, after a yawn. "You get the chair, Snapper." He laughed as the troopers manacled Lund. "Yeah, that's what I call a good split, Snapper."



Killer of the Cragland



By Eric Lennox

Author of "Loot Liability," etc.

Behind grim walls of an inventor's castle a strange murder method snuffed out the gun king's life. And Slat McFarlane, Sherlock of the Park Rangers, needed a new kind of crime chart to analyze this homicide blueprint.

"SLATS" MACFARLANE hunched over the wheel and drove with a reckless efficiency that approached genius. The Park road unreeled under the wheels of the little patrol car like a silver ribbon jerked rapidly from an ebony box. Twisting curves leaped dizzily out of

the night and ground swiftly beneath the humming tires. Slat hummed a mournful little melody under his breath.

Slat McFarlane was considered a disgrace to the service by the chief of the Park Rangers. His lanky figure was all points and angles upon which

even the neat khaki uniform draped like the weathered folds of a scarecrow's garment. He was tall, and raw-boned, and almost Lincolnesque in his complete lack of handsomeness.

Yet that unlovely exterior covered a shrewd brain that caused MacFarlane's fellow rangers to call him "Sherlock" with a great deal more of honest respect than of laughing mockery. Slats drew the tough assignments when the Rangers ran up against something outside of the usual police routine. Which was doubtless why Roland Steele, a crack agent of the War Department, chose him as a companion in the investigation of Cragland and its teasing mystery.

Queer things had been happening at Cragland, and Roland Steele thought that the lanky ranger was just the man to help him find out why. Right now, however, Steele was close to regretting that decision. He regarded MacFarlane with evident uneasiness.

"If it's all the same to you, you can take these corners a little easier," he suggested. "I don't seem to be able to remember when I paid my last insurance premium!"

MacFarlane grinned. "Believe me, mister, I'm in no rush to get to Cragland," he declared. "I haven't lost anything in that spooky neighborhood, and that's a fact. Y' ought to be with me some time when I'm in a hurry!"

Steele groaned. "No thank you," he declined politely. "I prefer my airplanes to have wings! Say, just what do you mean by spooky? I've noticed that you use that term a good bit."

"Spooky can mean anything that's odd, or queer, or generally haywire," MacFarlane explained. "And take it from me, Cragland is all three! At that, it ain't a dang bit worse than the gang that hangs out there. Old C. D. Bushner is the king pin, and he's got a laboratory built a little ways off from the main house. From all accounts, Bushner is an ace inventor, and it's a cinch that he's made plenty of jack, but nobody would hole up in such a forsaken spot unless they had

something plenty disturbing on their minds!"

"You think that he's hiding from somebody?" Steele inquired.

"Somebody or something," MacFarlane agreed. "From all accounts, old Bushner's done lots of folks dirt."

"He must have quite a force of servants," Steele suggested.

"It ain't Bushner that keeps th' servants," the ranger replied. "Y' see, Cragland proper belongs t' Robert Speer, Bushner's partner. Matter of fact, I guess that Speer really holds th' purse strings. He's the business end of the partnership, and helps Bushner dope out stuff on the side, particularly radio stuff. Speer is an electrical wizard. It's a funny combination, especially since there's been talk about Bushner handing Speer a nasty double-cross some time back. Me, I wouldn't take Speer for a forgiving cuss, but then I don't like Speer, and Speer don't like me."

"Interesting, but personal," Steele commented. "I'm after something different. We've had a man keeping an eye on things, and he's sent in some disturbing reports. Shadowy prowlers, a mysterious woman, midnight conferences behind locked doors. And now, all at once, our agent seems to have disappeared. Frankly, Bushner is engaged in perfecting a new self-aiming anti-aircraft gun, and we suspect that certain foreign powers are plotting to secure it."

"There's been a bunch of strangers hanging around the Park," MacFarlane said slowly. "They might be mixed up in it. As for women, there's Virginia Trace, Bushner's secretary, but the only mystery about her is why she works for such an outfit. She's prettier than a picture, and smarter than a whip, and I'll swear that she's as straight as a string! And that's something, because neither Bushner nor Speer has a good reputation as far as women are concerned!" His face wrinkled thoughtfully as he again turned his attention to the road.

SUDDENLY they wheeled around a great bluff, and there before them lay a walled estate. Cold stone flashed back the rays of their headlights as they passed through an arched gateway. Ahead was a massive pile of masonry that aped a medieval castle. Pricking pinpoints of light sparkled in its recessed windows. About a hundred yards to one side was a squat building flanked by lighted wires of a small broadcasting station.

MacFarlane switched off his motor and lights, coasting up to the main building in a quiet glide. Just then all the windows of the house went black. A mad unearthly laugh ripped the suddenly solid silence. That laugh seemed to jeer, and mock, and threaten, all in a single breath. Then it mingled with the crescendo notes of a piercing scream. There was terror in that scream. Blood-chilling terror that ended abruptly with a horrible, choking finality.

Steele gripped the ranger's arm with tense fingers. "Great heavens!" he gasped, "What was that?"

MacFarlane did not answer. One hand jerked for the switch of the spotlight, and a brilliant beam cut through the darkness. That slender pencil of light leaped out just in time to illuminate the slim figure of a woman who was hurrying toward the car. In an instant, she perceived the uniform of the ranger. With a stifled shriek of dismay, she dodged out of the light and ran swiftly for the shelter of the roadside.

Steele was out of the car with a bound. MacFarlane searched the grounds with swift, erratic stabs of the spotlight, whipping its brilliance back and forth in jerky arcs. From somewhere, a shadowy phantom dived at Steele. A knife gleamed. Steele's arm shot out and up in a wicked, twisting blow, and that shadow went spinning. The spotlight shifted, and picked up the scurrying shape of the fleeing woman just as Steele gained her side.

Instantly she hurled something

from her hand, and again a shadowy someone rose from the brush to catch what she threw. A pistol flame laced the night a split second after MacFarlane's voice bawled a harsh command to stand still. The ranger's service gun roared a harsh answer to the spiteful bark of the automatic, and the shadow dropped. MacFarlane's feet thudded swiftly against the ground.

Steele hurried back to the car, tightly claspng a struggling armful of tangled skirt and silken hosiery. His jaw snapped tight as the glow from the dash lighted a pretty slant-eyed face.

"Toy San!" he exclaimed harshly. "I might expect to find you somewhere about when there are government secrets to be pried into!"

The pretty little Oriental relaxed in his arms, and looked up at him with a twisty smile. "The very clever Roland Steele could not be wrong," she declared mockingly. "You follow me about like a very jealous and mistrusting lover!"

"And now that I have found you, I shall take good care that you do not escape me this time," Steele stated grimly. There was the sharp click of metal as he cuffed her slender wrist to the steering wheel.

Toy San laughed musically. "I am your prisoner," she said softly, turning the full battery of her charm upon him. "A prisoner of love?"

"A prisoner of state," Steele contradicted firmly, yet he felt a little stab of sympathy in his heart as he looked at her. She was so small and appealing. But her dainty prettiness was only a cover for a steel-hard determination and ruthless efficiency, and no one knew that better than did Roland Steele. Murder was but little more than a tiresome detail to her if she should find murder necessary.

A MOMENT later MacFarlane joined them. He splattered the ground with a splash of tobacco juice. "The fellow you slugged made his

getaway," he announced disgustedly. "This fellow's a case for the coroner," he added, dragging a limp something into the light. That light glowed softly on a yellow face. "Looks to be some kind of a Chink," he commented callously. "I see you got his sister."

"Sister, the devil!" Steele snapped. "This is Toy San, one of the cleverest operators employed by a certain group of politicians in the Far East!"

"You don't say!" the ranger exclaimed. "Then maybe we better be findin' out what's happened at th' house. They tell me these Chinks are hell for funny stuff!" He dropped the dead man and made for the front entrance of the main building.

Behind that door was the sound of hurried confusion. Suddenly the lights flashed on. A white-faced servant opened the door in response to MacFarlane's pounding. The lanky ranger inserted a big foot through the narrow opening, and crashed his way in.

"What the hell's coming off here?" he demanded savagely.

There was a blank look on the servant's face. "We—we're trying to find out, sir," he stammered worriedly. "Just a minute, sir, and—"

The quick tap of running feet in the hallway interrupted his words, and a very white and frightened girl rushed toward the door. Her clothing was disheveled, and a dark something was smeared on her sleeve. MacFarlane recognized Virginia Trace. Her face lighted at sight of the ranger.

"Thank heavens, you're here!" she exclaimed. "Something terrible has happened! I've tried to call Mr. Bushner, but he does not answer. His door is locked. And there is something wet leaking from under it—it looks like blood!"

There was a muffled exclamation from behind the ranger. He whirled to surprise a dazed expression on Steele's face. The War Department agent was looking at the girl with a stunned expression in his eyes.

MacFarlane grinned. "Keep your

head, boy," he advised in a quick undertone. "This is no time to be falling for a dame! This looks to be plenty serious!"

A smothered gasp came from the girl. She, too, seemed suddenly dazed, and there was recognition in her eyes as she stared at Roland Steele; recognition, and something else that the ranger could not identify. But he was instantly aware that Virginia Trace and Roland Steele were not strangers.

The angry voice of Robert Speer jerked MacFarlane's attention from this surprising discovery. The owner of Cragland stood in the doorway, and he seemed very much put out at finding MacFarlane on the scene. Speer had evidently hurried over from the laboratory, and for some reason the ranger's uniform incensed him. He glared at MacFarlane, and demanded the reason for the ranger's intrusion.

SLATS MACFARLANE shifted his quid of tobacco to the far side of his mouth, and returned Speer's glance with cool indifference. "Y' don't act like y' relish seeing the law in here, Mr. Speer," he commented softly. "Now I wonder why."

Speer fairly choked with wrath. "Law!" he sneered. "What kind of law is represented by a halfwit in hand-me-down clothing? By what authority are you here?"

MacFarlane knotted a bony fist, and eyed it thoughtfully. "I reckon this is as good authority as any," he declared. "I'm just aching to have you dispute it!"

The ranger's attitude puzzled Steele, and he was quick to sense some strong antagonism between the two men. He stepped forward quickly. "I'm Steele from the War Department," he introduced himself to Speer. "I believe that my commission will cover any question of authority."

Speer started slightly, and a faint pallor lightened the angry red of his skin. "I warn you, you will have to answer to your superiors for this," he began. "I—"

"Oh, heavens, don't stand here talking," Virginia Trace interrupted, and there was a trace of hysteria in her voice. "Something terrible has happened to Mr. Bushner!" She turned and led the way swiftly down the hall.

MacFarlane and Steele had to force their way past a crowding group of frightened and curious servants to reach the door of Bushner's study. That door was heavy and massive, and evidently secure. MacFarlane gave one swift glance at a dark, unmistakable stain that was spreading into the hallway, and his voice took on an incisive quality.

"Where's the keys to this door?" he asked sharply. "Who's the chief flunky around here?"

A middle-aged, rather fleshy man stepped forward. He was very dignified, very much the proper servant, in spite of the worried expression on his stolid face. "I'm Hawkins, the butler, sir," he announced importantly. "There are no keys to that door, sir. It is secured by magnetic bolts."

"Well, how do you work 'em?" the ranger demanded.

"That's just it, sir," Hawkins said uneasily. "The bolts are controlled by an electric switch from inside, sir. We would have opened the door otherwise. Do you think Mr. Bushner is—" He hesitated.

MacFarlane threw his bony bulk against the hard wood, but it did not even give a trifle. "I'm not thinking," he snapped, "I'm finding out!"

"I scarcely think that it is necessary to be so violent about it," Speer declared harshly. "Why not ask Miss Trace to slip the bolts for you? I am sure that she is familiar with the mechanism that works the lock, and it can be operated from this hallway!"

"You—you," Virginia Trace's voice was choked. "Oh, I know nothing about it! I swear I don't!"

Robert Speer laughed nastily. "No? Then you are the first of Bushner's lady friends to be kept out of the secret!" His intimation was unmistakable.

Virginia Trace gasped. Roland Steele's face flushed angrily. He stepped toward Speer, fists clenched. "You dirty-mouthed cur!" he grated through clenched teeth. "I—"

"Steele!" MacFarlane's voice cracked like a whip. "Help me smash in this door!"

Steele turned reluctantly. Virginia Trace was standing with one hand pressed tight against her breast. She was very pale, and her eyes reflected intense nerve strain. Steele felt a sudden uneasiness, a chill doubt. MacFarlane tapped him on the shoulder.

"Watch yourself, son," the ranger whispered swiftly. "Can't you see that Speer is tryin' to pin something on the girl?"

The two men threw themselves against the door. It shook but did not give. Hawkins added his weight to the next attempt, and there was the shriek of screws ripping clear of splintering wood. The door tore from its hinges, and the three men stumbled into the dark interior of the room. Just inside the threshold lay a crumpled body.

"Lights!" MacFarlane barked.

HAWKINS' finger found a button, and the soft brilliance of concealed lamps flashed on. Here and there that light reflected gently from the metal of strange and ancient weapons hung on the walls. Rich rugs littered the polished floor, and the dull shine of well rubbed varnish marked expensive furniture. The room was typically the retreat of an eccentric man to whom money was no object.

But no one had a thought for the room at that moment. Instead, every eye was fixed on that slumped figure near the door. It was clad in a silk lounging robe, yet it was not the ugly stain on that robe, nor the horrible motionlessness of the wearer that brought the shocked gasp from those crowding about the doorway. It was the sight of a carved knife hilt protruding from the body.

Strangely enough, no one doubted that Bushner was dead, but the man-

ner of his passing held stark terror. He had been struck down behind locked doors, doors that he thought secured him from all intrusion. There were no windows in the room.

Steele leaned over and felt for a pulse that would never beat again, then straightened and shook his head. MacFarlane's lips drew tight as he turned away. Robert Speer crowded past the ranger and made straight for an open wall safe. MacFarlane shot him a single narrowed glance, then turned his attention to the room.

An ornate mantelpiece took up a large part of one wall. Above that mantelpiece, as indeed on practically every bit of available wall space, ancient and modern weapons offered the only ornamentation. The dull gleam of an old mace vied with the nicked glitter of a new hunting knife. No particular period or nationality was represented, the different objects having the appearance of being collected at random by someone who cared little for discriminate value.

Near a large radio, a floor lamp had been overturned. Otherwise there was no sign that would indicate any kind of struggle. MacFarlane eyed the lamp closely for a brief moment, then looked at the radio. The pilot light of that radio was burning, but no sound came from the instrument.

Steele, too, was examining the room thoroughly. Suddenly he picked up something that lay beneath a table, and started to pocket it with a most stealthy gesture. Bony fingers clamped about his wrist. MacFarlane's voice spoke quietly for his ear alone.

"Steady, boy," the ranger warned. "You'll not help matters by holding out evidence. Use your eyes. See that knife? Chink, ain't it? Suppose you go get that woman you got in the car. Maybe we better ask her a couple of questions! And don't worry, the girl will come clear."

Steele's hands opened reluctantly. It held a wadded kerchief of lace and linen. An embroidered V marked one corner.

A sharp exclamation came from Speer at this moment.

"Something missing?" MacFarlane asked.

"Yes, there's something missing!" Speer rasped harshly. "The plans of Bushner's Anti-Aircraft Gun are gone!" He whirled and pointed an accusing finger at Virginia Trace. "Arrest that woman!" he shouted. "She's been trying to get her hands on those plans for weeks! She's the only one who could get in here. And she did! Look at her! Look at the blood on her sleeve! She's the one who is responsible for this!"

Steele's eyes blazed. He started across the room toward Speer, but MacFarlane thrust out a restraining arm that had suddenly become a thing of steel and whipcord muscle.

"I'm handling this!" the ranger snapped savagely. "Hawkins, you call the sheriff. Speer, you keep quiet until I ask for your opinion! There's murder been done here, and we're going to get to th' bottom of it before the coroner gets here!"

Somehow, the lanky ranger no longer seemed the least bit awkward or uncouth. Even his uniform suddenly appeared to fit his bony frame with almost tailored neatness. He was now every inch the alert, efficient officer.

ONCE under way, the investigation of Bushner's murder proceeded with smoothness and dispatch. The occupants of the house were gathered in a single large room. Each eyed the other with uneasy suspicion, and MacFarlane left them alone, satisfied that their mutual distrust would serve as efficiently as an armed guard. Steele accompanied him back to Bushner's study.

MacFarlane regarded the younger man with sympathetic eyes. "Tough break, boy," he commented understandingly. "You know Miss Trace pretty well, don't you?"

Steele shifted uncomfortably. "We were engaged once," he confessed mis-

erably. "I never dreamed I'd find her here. Like this!"

"Suppose you tell me about it," MacFarlane suggested. "To begin with, who is she? I know her name ain't Trace."

"No, it's Trent," Steele admitted slowly. "Her brother is something of an inventor. He had some important plans stolen, and she wanted me to throw up my job and help her recover them. I couldn't see things that way. We quarreled. I didn't see her again until— Well, you saw—you know—oh, it's a mess!"

"And you think maybe that Bushner or Speer is the party that swiped those plans?" MacFarlane commented shrewdly. "Well, I wouldn't put it past either one of them— And she's just the plucky sort that'd play a deep game to try to get 'em back! But she wouldn't kill except to protect herself. What do you make of it?"

"I don't like it!" Steele said simply. "Virginia wasn't telling the truth about that lock switch. I know! And then that handkerchief! Why didn't the department send a real detective on this case? All I've ever handled was routine!"

"Keep a stiff lip," MacFarlane advised kindly. "We'll get the straight of this. You go get that Toy San woman, and send Hawkins in to me. I got a hunch."

A moment later Hawkins was in the doorway. "You wanted me, sir?" he inquired politely.

MacFarlane regarded him sharply. "Hawkins, you ought to speak to th' maids," he declared severely. "This room is dusty as the devil!"

The butler was immediately on the defensive. "It's not their fault, sir," he protested. "Mr. Bushner was a very peculiar man, sir. He seldom allowed any of the maids in this room, sir. He seemed afraid that they might take something. As though anyone would want to get away with one of these horrid murder tools!"

"Murder tools?" The ranger was instantly interested.

"Yes sir." Hawkins waved a hand at the walls. "Every single one of these weapons had taken human life, sir! Mr. Bushner made a collection of such things. He was very proud of it. Only last month he raised an awful row because of a missing cross-bow, sir. He said it was a very interesting piece that was used in the assassination of a duke or something!"

"Morbid cuss, wasn't he," MacFarlane commented, casting a glance at the motionless body. "You better cover him with a sheet or something. Might be a little less gruesome!" He turned toward the massive mantelpiece. "I'll give him credit for good taste in fireplaces, though," he added.

"That's Mr. Speer's idea, sir," Hawkins corrected. "He had that installed for Mr. Bushner."

"So?" MacFarlane shot a quick glance toward the butler. "By the way, what caused the lights to go out a while back?"

"A burnt fuse, sir," Hawkins replied. "I can't imagine how it happened to blow out."

"I think I know," MacFarlane declared, eyeing the fallen floor lamp. "Tell Mr. Speer I want to talk with him, will you?" He walked over to the radio.

"How come this thing isn't working?" he asked Speer as that gentleman entered. "The lights seem to be burning."

SPEER glanced at the tuning dials. "It's set for the wave length of the plant at our experimental laboratory," he told the ranger. "Since I am here, it is of course silent."

"You do all the broadcasting from there, don't you?" MacFarlane asked. "What were you broadcasting to-night?"

Speer looked startled. "I was sending out some stuff for a radio thriller," he declared. "Bushner and I were working out some weird sound effects. He was to tune in on them here." He

looked meaningfully at the ranger. "I get your point," he exclaimed. "Bushner must have been alive at that time, or the dials would not have been tuned for my wave length!"

MacFarlane nodded. "That's a break for you," he agreed. "It's a sure-fire alibi that comes in handy seeing how you hated Bushner! You didn't happen to include a hell-stirring screech in t'night's program?"

Speer shook his head. "No, just a little wild music, and whispering, and crazy laughter," he said, puzzled. "But I don't happen to need an alibi. Bushner was my friend and partner!"

"That didn't keep you from scrapping over Bushner's pretty little secretary," MacFarlane remarked dryly. "Men have been killed about such trifles, you know! Suppose you send her up to me when you go. I want to question her."

"You're not going to allow her to come here unattended, are you?" Speer demanded incredulously. "Why she is most probably the one who killed Bushner! She'll take any chance to escape!"

"You heard me!" MacFarlane snapped. "Get going! A girl isn't necessarily a murderess because she won't stand for your dirty advances!"

Virginia Trace, or Trent, as MacFarlane now knew her, entered the room at practically the same instant as Roland Steele and the diminutive Toy San. MacFarlane waved them to chairs, and looked at Toy San sharply.

"You're in a mighty tough spot, young woman," he told the little Oriental harshly. "I've got enough on you to hold you for this murder!" He indicated Bushner's sheet-covered body. "The best thing that you can do is to talk fast and pretty!"

Toy San eyed him with an agate blank stare. "You have no evidence!" she stated coolly.

"No?" MacFarlane stepped over and jerked the sheet from Bushner's corpse. "Try to tell a jury that isn't an Oriental knife! Try to explain how you happened to have these plans in

your possession!" He produced a packet of papers from an inside pocket. "Plans that were supposed to be in Bushner's safe at the time you were making off with them!"

Toy San smiled quietly. "I will be taken care of by my government," she assured him. "Your law will not stir up international trouble when it has a more likely suspect on which to turn its attention!" She glanced toward Virginia Trent. "This woman was in this room just before the murder! And she was quarreling violently with the dead man! And look at her dress! Is it not blood-stained?"

A choking sob came from Virginia Trent. "How did you know that?" she asked. "Oh, it's true, it's true! But I swear I did not kill Mr. Bushner!"

ROLAND STEELE slipped an arm around her shaking shoulders and drew her tight against him. Toy San laughed rather hollowly. "So the watchdog of the War Department is not heartless," she mocked. "Well, do not worry, the funny man in the wrinkled uniform is not going to arrest either of us for murder!" She winked impudently at MacFarlane.

The ranger grinned wryly. "How do you figure that out?" he demanded.

Toy San pointed to the handle of the knife standing out from Bushner's body. "Do not tell me that you have not already discovered how this weapon reached its mark!" she declared. "You know well that it was not thrust there, it was thrown! And you do not think that either this lady or myself is guilty!"

MacFarlane's eyes widened with sincere respect. "You sure know your stuff!" he stated feelingly. "I'd like to work with you!"

"We would make a good pair," Toy San agreed honestly. "It is, unfortunately, impossible. Now I will make a bargain with you. If I can convince you that I am innocent of any crime, that I have stolen nothing, will you release me? I will disappear, and I will take with me the body of the man

you so surely shot! It will save much trouble with my government!"

MacFarlane glanced inquiringly at Steele. "How about it?" he demanded.

"It would simplify things a lot," the War Department man admitted slowly. "Arresting Toy San would kick up an awful stink if we didn't have a lot on her. Of course it may be irregular, but such things are done!"

"Then it's a go!" MacFarlane declared. "Strut your stuff, miss, it's going to take some tall talking to convince me that you're not putting something over!"

Toy San laughed again. "As long as you hold those papers, you need not worry," she protested. "It is for them that I came. And but for the mischance of Fate, I should have escaped with them! I slipped into this room while your Mr. Bushner was so busy trying to make love to his secretary. They did not see me. It was an easy task to search the open safe while they were arguing. They were so excited, and the pretty secretary was so very angry. She struck at him and fled.

"And as he turned, cursing, I, too, slipped out unseen. The radio was playing, yet I heard the click of bolts as the door closed. I concealed myself in the dark shadows of the hall, waiting my chance for escape. It came. The lights went out. You know the rest. Have I filled my part of the bargain?"

MacFarlane nodded. "And I'm glad you ain't after old gold instead of the plans of an invention," he commented. "I got some bridgework in my mouth that I'm powerful fond of!"

Steele sighed with disappointment. "We're just as far as ever from the murderer," he murmured.

Toy San paused on her way to the door. "I would not worry," she said softly. "I think that your friend in the wrinkled uniform will solve the problem easily. He is very clever!" She waved a hand gracefully in a farewell gesture.

MacFarlane splashed a thin brown

stream of tobacco juice toward the fireplace. "Don't that beat hell?" he exclaimed feelingly. "Now she's what I'd call a real smart woman!"

He stared intently at the papers in his hand as though to reassure himself that they were still safe. A moment later his face wrinkled in a thoughtful frown. "Explain these to me, will you?" he requested suddenly.

Steele studied the papers carefully. "This is the plan for a new aiming device to be used on anti-aircraft armament," he informed the ranger. "See, here it is. The sound of an airplane motor registers on this mechanism which automatically aims and fires the gun."

Virginia Trent peered over his shoulder. "That's my brother's invention," she declared excitedly. "It's a sound locator. With proper adjustment, it will indicate the source of any type of sound impulse!"

MacFarlane looked at her quickly. "Could it be fixed so that it could aim anything, such as a rifle or pistol, at a man's voice?" he demanded.

"It is so accurate that it can be set to register the sound of a falling feather!" the girl answered simply.

"That's all I need to know," MacFarlane declared, glancing toward the mantelpiece. The sound of an automobile motor cut short any further comment. The sheriff's party had arrived.

THE sheriff breezed in with the air of a man who is anxious to be quickly done with a disagreeable task. "Well, Sherlock, what's the lay of things?" he demanded of the ranger. "Let's get going!"

MacFarlane quickly sketched the situation, carefully avoiding all reference to Toy San.

The sheriff promptly became a very worried man. "Cripes!" he exploded. "This is a nasty mess! And just before election, too! Well, I reckon we've got to arrest this secretary woman. She's the one who did it, or else she wouldn't have that blood on her dress.

She must have stuck him, and then locked the door behind her!"

MacFarlane shook his head stubbornly. "Nope," he declared. "Y'll notice a little speck of dried blood on her upper lip. The way I see it, she bumped herself in the dark, and had a little nose bleed. No, she ain't the guilty party!"

"Then who is?" the sheriff demanded. "Listen, Mac, we got to make somebody the goat. We can't go hiring some high-priced detective to come in here and straighten things out. Not with the county hollering for lower expenses!"

"You fetch Speer, and Hawkins, and the girl into Bushner's study, and I'll soon show you the right party to put the cuffs on!" the ranger promised.

The sheriff grinned. "Going to put on a grandstand finish, are you?" he commented. "Well, if you can bust this case, I won't begrudge you a few fireworks!"

He turned to the rest of his party, and within minutes the murder room took on the appearance of an impromptu court. MacFarlane paced the floor, jaws working rhythmically on a fresh supply of his favorite plug. Suddenly he whirled on the butler.

"Hawkins," he barked, "what was the state of feeling between Speer and Bushner?"

"They—they were not always too friendly, sir," the butler replied uneasily.

"And yet Mr. Speer made Bushner a gift of this beautiful mantelpiece?" the ranger asked sharply. "Built it himself, I think you said."

"That was after one of his quarrels, sir," Hawkins explained.

"Quarrels?" MacFarlane's eyebrows lifted.

"Yes, sir. They frequently disagreed about Mr. Bushner's secretary, sir. Mr. Bushner objected to Mr. Speer's attentions." Hawkins seemed to relish relating this bit of household scandal.

"Yes?" MacFarlane appeared



thoughtful. "Now, Hawkins, Mr. Bushner lost a weapon from his col-

lection some time ago, didn't he? One that he valued highly? A crossbow, wasn't it? And he blamed the servants?"

Hawkins's face reddened. "I'm very certain that there was some mistake, sir," he protested. "I assure you that I am very careful about those under me, sir. None of them could have taken it, sir!"

"Then who did?" MacFarlane asked sharply. "How about Mr. Speer? Do you think that he could possibly have appropriated the article?"

SPEER was on his feet in an instant. "What do you mean?" he blazed angrily. "Are you accusing me of stealing things? Insulting me in my own house? I'll not stay here and listen to you!"

"You'll stay and like it!" MacFarlane rasped. "Now shut up! Hawkins, answer my question!"

"I—I'm not sure, sir," the butler stammered miserably. "I never happened to think of it that way, sir. Of course, Mr. Speer could very easily have secured the weapon, but he does not care for such things, sir."

"Well I think that he did, this time!" MacFarlane declared grimly. He pointed an accusing finger at Speer. "Sheriff, you better cuff this man. He's the murderer you're looking for!"

"You're crazy!" Speer exploded. "I didn't do it! I couldn't do it! I was at the experimental station when Bushner was killed! I can prove that!"

"So can I," MacFarlane declared harshly. "You were at the radio controls, broadcasting Death's own hellish laughter! And that laughter killed a man who thought himself secure behind locked doors!"

Speer paled. "Prove it!" he demanded in a forced whisper.

"I'm going to!" MacFarlane stated emotionlessly. "Let's reconstruct the scene—"

A deep thick silence smothered the

room as the lanky ranger stepped to the radio. Every eye was glued on his least movement.

"I'm Bushner," MacFarlane explained. "I'm tuning in on Speer's broadcast. Remember, I'm doing so because of appointment. What do I hear? I hear a voice whispering to me out of the air, the voice of a man I now know for my enemy. That voice tells me that my time has come! I know the devilish ingenuity of this man—I realize that I am trapped, but I turn to flee. This lamp upsets, short-circuits! The lights go out! And then comes a devilish mocking laugh as though the air had eyes to see my terror!"

"You're dreaming!" Speer's grated whisper cut the horror-filled tensity of the room.

"No!" said MacFarlane. "I can hear that laugh yet. . . . I could almost imitate it! Look! Look at that mantelpiece!"

Every eye in the room shifted, and suddenly a wild hair-raising peal of hellish glee rang through the room. Like a winking eyelid, the front of the mantelpiece dropped, then started back upward. But MacFarlane's quick leap and stabbing fingers stopped its movement. Inside of that false mantel front was a complicated mechanism of wires, and gears, and vacuum tubes. Attached to it was an ancient English crossbow.

"A variation of the Bushner Anti-Aircraft Gun," MacFarlane commented quietly. "The crossbow hurled a knife instead of a bolt, and the apparatus automatically aimed at Bushner's pounding heart! Death laughed, and the sound of that laughter opened the fireplace panel!"

"Speer, you might have got away with it, but everything in this room was dusty except the *mantel front*. I knew something was wrong, and it wasn't hard to figure out what it was. You're guilty as hell, and I reckon I've proved it!"



Rap for a Rat



By Chester Brant

Author of "Satan's Gallop."

Detective Biff Duryea knew Patty O'Reilly for a good kid—but she had been caught red-handed with a fur wrap. Duryea made it his business to see that Patty did not take a fur rap.

AS DETECTIVE "Biff" Duryea walked down the corridor past the precinct cells, he was humming a tuneless version of a late popular song. Suddenly he halted and stopped humming. His perpetually dumb and usually expressionless face showed a flicker of surprise as he stared into a cell upon his left. He motioned to a bleary-eyed cop with

open coat at the end of the corridor to unlock the cell door.

Duryea pushed his big frame through the door. A trace of surprise discernible in his voice, he said:

"Patty O'Reilly. I never figured on seeing you here."

The girl looked up. She had been crying. Her pretty little face was red and streaked. With the manner of one unexpectedly finding an old friend in a strange and hostile land, she gasped:

"Mr. Duryea!"

Her eyes showed relief and sudden hope.

"Who framed you into this hole?" Duryea asked, faint anger in his voice.

"It *was* a frame, Mr. Duryea! I haven't done a thing—honest, not a thing!"

Duryea sat. He looked at Patty closely. He had known her since she was a kid. Straight as a string.

"Tell your Uncle Biff," he said kindly.

"I—I've never been in—in a cell before. It's—it's awful!"

"You're right. It is."

"They—they framed me, Mr. Duryea. They did, honest!"

"Who?"

"I don't know."

This, Duryea told himself, was unusual. Ordinarily, a person knew who had done the framing, and why. But he asked: "How'd it happen, Patty?"

Her face was without deceit, her tone frank, as she explained:

"Yesterday afternoon as I was leaving work—I work in Golio's Fur Store—Mr. Golio stopped me and gave me a bundle to deliver the first thing this morning. It was out of my way, so he gave me carfare. He said it didn't make any difference if I was a little late."

Duryea nodded, and she continued: "So I took the bundle home and kept it in my room all night. This morning, I left my room with the bundle, in-

tending to deliver it and when I stepped outside the house, Mr. Crain, the policeman, was there."

"Officer Crain, eh?"

"Yes. He said, 'Hello, Patty,' and I told him good morning. Then he asked, 'Pretty big bundle for a little girl to carry, isn't it? And I told him I didn't mind. He looked at me kind of funny and wanted to know what was in it. I told him I didn't know."

"He laughed in a sneering way and demanded to see what was in it. I told him I couldn't, but he got mad so I took the bundle back into the house and opened it. It was a fur coat. Mr. Crain said, 'I thought so. Figured you were pretty safe, didn't you? Well, come along, the chief would like to see you.' Honest, Mr. Duryea, I was so frightened, I didn't know what to do!"

"And what did the chief say?"

"The furs had been stolen. They accused me of doing it. But I didn't. I didn't know anything about it until the chief told me."

"Um," said Duryea.

"And that wasn't all. Mr. Crain went back to my room and found four more coats. There wasn't much I could say except that somebody had put them there while I was being arrested. And they didn't believe me."

"Did you call Mr. Golio?"

"Yes, and Mr. Golio told the chief that he didn't give me the coat to deliver and that I was fired!"

"Muffy Sirro has been makin' a play for you, hasn't he?" Duryea asked.

A look of loathing came over Patty's face. "Yes," she admitted. Then: "How did you know?"

"I always kind of keep an eye on folks I used to know."

"But I told him where he could head in. I don't want to be mixed up with racketeers."

Duryea rose.

"Yeh," he said. "Be seein' you." And left.

CHIEF of Detectives Egan snorted. "But damme, Biff, we can't go butting into cases like that!"

"Yeh, but she was framed, chief."

"How do you know she was framed? How do you know she isn't stringing you?"

Biff looked at his chief in a mildly reproachful way.

"You know Patty O'Reilly, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes," Egan admitted, and it became promptly evident that he also knew Patty was not the sort who'd lie about things. He swore. Then:

"But who'd want to frame her, Biff? Why, that little kid hasn't got an enemy in the world!"

"Maybe Sirro got her framed so he could get her out of it and show her what a big shot he is," Duryea suggested.

Egan laughed shortly.

"Listen, Biff, those coats were worth over two grand each. Does it sound like Muffy Sirro to blow ten grand away on a kid like Patty? Do you really think he'd swipe those furs and then hand 'em back just to get Patty in bad? That's pretty dumb reasoning!"

Duryea scratched his head. Then he helped himself to one of Egan's cigarettes.

He said: "I'd like to see what I can see, chief."

Egan swore again.

"Sometimes," he growled. "I don't know who's running this office—you or I! Well, there's nothing else hot I can put you on, so go ahead. But keep low. Mustn't let the chief of police know you're kind of checking up on his gang." He stopped, went on: "And no strong-arm stuff! No busting into places and socking everybody with your hams of fists! Be gentlemanly! Talk and don't hit, for a change!"

"Swell," said Duryea doubtfully. "G'by."

He took another of Egan's cigarettes which he put in his volumi-

nous pocket, ambled through Egan's door, through the squad room where Marshall and Tinner were playing pinochle, and out into the street.

BIFF DURYEA was no master detective. To the contrary, he was generally credited with being the dumbest dick in captivity. Certainly he was no collar-ad model. Rugged, tall and broad, his clothes ill-fitting, his manner abrupt, his movements awkward, he would hardly be set up as a paragon.

But Duryea had a peculiar knack of delivering the goods. Criminals were afraid of him. He was so dumb he never knew when he was licked. More, there wasn't a crooked tinge in him. He couldn't be bought. And criminals always fear those they cannot buy.

A Main Street car slowed in front of the building. Duryea had just left. He hopped the car, went in and took a seat.

He thought: There isn't a person Patty can turn to for help. Her folks are all dead and all she's got is a hall bedroom. Funny Crain would think of making her open that bundle. He knows Patty. Why did he think the coats were in the bundle? Somebody took care of him like they took care of Golio. And maybe Egan don't think Sirro would toss away five fur coats to make a splash with Patty, but he's the kind of guy who thinks he's a sheik with the women. And Patty's one girl who told him where he could head in—

He went to the front of the car, said, "'Lo" to the motorman and hopped off.

He walked two blocks from Main into the East Side district. Then, slowing to a leisurely strolling pace, he approached a fruit stand in the middle of the third block. In front of the stand stood a policeman eating an apple.

"Howdy, Duryea," the officer greeted him when he had drawn near.

Duryea stopped and said: "'Lo, Crain."

"Have an apple?" the cop asked. Duryea looked at the Italian proprietor who was scowling. Then he shook his head and said: "No." Crain threw the core of the first apple on top of the fruit display and selected a second apple meticulously.

"What brings you out this way?" Crain asked.

"Nothin' much," Duryea answered. "I was just browsin' around."

"Um," Crain said.

"Too bad about little Patty O'Reilly."

"Yeh, I hated to bring her in. But a crook is a crook. We're wearing a uniform, y'know."

A faint tinge of scorn showed in Duryea's face, but his voice was as expressionless as usual when he said:

"Headlines for you, too."

"I was just doing my duty."

"I never would of figured Patty mixed up in a crooked deal."

"Sometimes these innocent-looking skirts is the crookedest. You got to learn that, y'know."

Duryea ached to plant his big fist on Crain's long nose.

"Sure," he agreed instead. "But I still can't figure how you ever thought of stoppin' Patty."

"It all comes of havin' brains. And usin' them."

"It's still pretty dim."

"I'll draw you a picture sometime," Crain said with heavy sarcasm.

"Yeh. Hear Muffy Sirro is comin' down to get Patty out of it."

"News to me," Crain stated and went on munching his apple.

"Yeh. Well, g'by."

Duryea moved off.

Crain hadn't batted an eyelash when he had lied about Muffy Sirro. Indeed, it seemed that it had really been news to him. Somebody had got to Crain, and abrupt mention of Sirro's name hadn't produced an impression. Funny.

GOLIO'S Fur Store was on Forty-fifth Street, two blocks over and one down. It was a dingy place, badly lighted and musty smelling.

A faded blonde approached as Duryea entered.

"Golio in?" Duryea asked.

"He's in conference. He may be an hour. If you'll wait—"

"Tell him Duryea wants to see him."

The girl hesitated, shrugged and disappeared through a dirty back door marked OFFICE. She returned a moment later and said:

"Mr. Golio can't see you now. You'll have to wait."

"Yeh."

He pushed past the girl, caught the knob of the door and opened it.

Golio was in the act of vanishing through a rear exit.

"'Lo, Golio. Don't let me break up the conference."

The fur dealer cursed under his breath and reentered his office.

"You got a helluva crust breakin' in on a guy like this!" he cried.

"I always wondered what one of these conferences was like, kind of."

"Well, what do you want? Say it an' get out!"

"I was aimin' for a peaceable chat."

"Ah, come on, flatfoot. What d'ya want?"

Duryea lowered his massive body into an ancient office chair. He glanced around the room. Narrow, light entering it from a small, barred transom-like window.

"This," he said slowly and distinctly, "is the second time today I been in a damp, dark little room with bars across the windows."

Golio caught his drift at once.

"If you're talkin' about that O'Reilly girl, I don't know anything about her! She was just lyin' an' she don't work here no more!"

"Yeh. Well, I was just wonderin' how she coulda pulled that fur robbery. It don't sound like a lone job."

"Don't jaw about it to me! I run a straight business! I got no use for

crooks! If that's all you got to say, you can beat it!"

"Yeh? Well, get this, Golio: I say you're a lousy crook and a dirty liar! I say you helped frame Patty O'Reilly!"

Golio's scrawny body shook with anger. His face twisted out of shape. He snarled.

"If you think you can talk like that to me, you're crazy!"

"Yeh?"

"Yeah! You get to hell outta here!"

"Who paid you for your part in the act, Golio?"

"You crazy copper! Get to hell outta here!"

Duryea wished he could sock this Golio in the face and then choke the truth out of him. There was only one way to make this kind of guy talk. Instead, he leaned across the grimy desk, tilted his head and looked at the souvenir paperweight there. It had come from The Citizen's National Bank. Then he reached for the phone.

"What—what you're goin' to do?"

Golio asked.

"I'm going to sit here until I get enough on you to make you talk," Duryea informed him pleasantly.

Golio laughed sneeringly.

Duryea called the bank.

"I got a friend there who'll slip me a little private info," he told the sweating fur dealer. After several connections, he got his man.

"'Lo, Bert? Biff Duryea. Yeh. Find out if Golio of Golio's Fur Store deposited a chunk of money today or yesterday, will you?"

There was a wait. Then:

"Yeh. Yeh, Bert, this is official. Yeh. Yeh. Thanks."

He put the telephone down. He gazed a long moment at Golio.

"Where'd you get the jack?" he asked.

"I sold a coat, that's where I got it! Is there a law against a fur dealer selling coats?"

"Let's see your record of the sale, Golio. One coat—all that money!"

"It was a ermine coat."

HE WON! THE GIRL OF HIS DREAMS.

DICK'S AN AWFULLY NICE FELLOW—

BUT HE HAS SUCH AN OLD LOOKING FIGURE. MY MOTHER SAYS I SHOULD GO WITH YOUNGER LOOKING MEN.

MARY WONT GO OUT WITH ME ANY MORE. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS WRONG, BOB?

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"Lissen, you; what I oughta do is sock you down! Do you let me see the books you keep for the government or do I call the revenue office and get 'em to come down and maybe find out that only half your stock is on the inventory?"

"You're a lousy copper!"

"Heh," said Duryea and chuckled.

Golio drew out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"Do you talk or do I get you in trouble with the revenue boys?"

"All my stock is entered! I keep straight records!" Golio snapped.

But Golio was trapped. Every crook in the state knew Golio was an open market for stolen furs and that he was likewise a fence for other contraband goods, on occasion. Many thousands of dollars of stuff passed through his hands that he wouldn't have dared enter on his books.

"Well, Golio, do you talk or do I call Bill Cook, down at Revenue?"

"You ain't got nothin' on me! You're bluffin'!"

Duryea picked up the phone and gave a number.

"Wait! Wait, Duryea! Put that phone down!"

Duryea put the phone down.

"Well," he asked, "who framed Patty O'Reilly?"

"I don't know."

The detective picked the phone up again.

"Wait! Put the phone down! So help me, Duryea, I don't know!"

"Yeh?"

Golio wiped his face with his handkerchief and repeated: "So help me." Then:

"I admit I gave Patty the coat. A guy come in here an' said if I'd give her the coat to deliver in the mornin', he'd take the ermine wrap off my hands—I been stuck with that wrap for a year."

"What'd this guy look like?"

"I never seen him before, Duryea. I don't know him."

"You're stallin', Golio."

"I'm not. It's straight. I never seen

him before. He had a scar across his left cheek."

"There ain't a guy in town with a scar like that!"

"I know it, Duryea, but I'm givin' it to you straight."

"Did he take the wrap?"

Golio hesitated, then he said: "Yes."

"What address he tell you to send it to?"

Again the fur dealer hesitated before answering.

"I sent it down to Muffy Sirro's apartment—he'll croak me for spillin' it!"

"G'by," said Duryea. He pushed through the door marked OFFICE and went out onto the street.

MUFFY SIRRO'S hangout was two blocks over. Duryea caught a street car and rode the two blocks.

He thought: The chief was wrong. I figured Sirro would make a play for Patty in a big way. But this method of talking and not socking—If Egan hadn't ordered—

He got off the car, ran across the traffic lane and drew up before a building marked MULVANEY'S GYM. He entered.

Dad Mulvaney came forward to meet him.

"Howdy, Biff?"

"'Lo, Dad."

"Come to tighten up them stomach muscles?"

"My stomach muscles are all right. Where's Muffy?"

"He ain't come in yet—yeah, there he is."

A dapper man, young, of medium height and pleasant face, came into the gymnasium behind Duryea.

Muffy greeted: "Hello, Duryea. Hello, Dad."

Duryea said: "Wanta see you, Muffy."

"Pinch?"

Duryea shook his head.

"Well, come on back, Duryea."

They went through a rear door, passed through a room where those of

his men who had risen early were playing poker, and continued through a door on the far side. In Sirro's office, the racketeer told Duryea to pull up a chair. Sirro, meanwhile, mixed two drinks.

"What's broke, Duryea?" Muffy asked over his shoulder.

"Crain has run Patty O'Reilly in."

"What!" The glasses almost dropped from Muffy's hands. There could be no doubting his surprise.

"You ain't heard about it?"

"Hell, no, Duryea. I just got up. I don't know a thing. What'd he try to hang on her?"

"Larceny, maybe. Possessing stolen goods, anyhow."

"Why, that dirty copper! Patty never stole a pin in her life!"

"Yeh, but he caught her with the goods."

"I'll have that lousy copper's heart for that! I'll run him out of town!"

"I got it against Crain because he is a grafter," Duryea said evenly.

Muffy picked up the phone. He called his lawyer.

"Hello, Weis? Muffy. Crain got Patty O'Reilly in the precinct jug on a charge of having stolen—" He broke off and asked Duryea: "What he say she stole, Duryea?"

"Furs," Duryea informed him.

"Furs?" Muffy's voice and expression were suddenly blank. But he recovered and told Weis: "Furs, Weis. Yeah. They haven't got a thing on her. What? You know Patty, don't you? Why, she wouldn't steal—Yeah, I know about them innocent dames, Weis, but Patty's different. You get her out of it, that's all." He hung up.

The racketeer took a swig and faced the detective again.

"What furs, Duryea?" he asked.

"The General Storage furs. She had all five of 'em."

Muffy was thoughtful.

At last he said: "She was framed, Duryea."

"Yeh, that's what I figured. Who done it, Muffy?"

"I don't know."



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"Oh, yeh, you do."

"I don't. But I got an idea."

"Well, be seein' you." Duryea rose and found his way from the building.

ON THE sidewalk, he glanced up at the gymnasium building. Two floors. Muffy's apartment was on the top floor. At the corner of the building on the left was the ground entrance to the apartment.

Duryea turned right. He passed an alley which bordered the apartment and gymnasium building. There was a sudden shot. A bullet clipped Duryea's right sleeve. Quick as a flash, he whirled and ducked behind the cover of the building.

From an open window above him came sounds of a scuffle. A shrill voice cried, "You fool!" Duryea glanced up. He saw that if his attacker should come to the window, he could easily shoot down at him.

Duryea lumbered to the door which led to the apartment. It was not locked. He entered.

He stood in a long hall. Midway down, on the left, were stairs leading up. He was on the point of mounting them when he heard indistinct cursing and a door above open. He tip-toed along the hall and hid himself under the staircase.

Stealthy footsteps came down the stairs. At the bottom, they hesitated. Duryea could picture the man there listening to sounds outside. Then they turned and came down the hall toward the back, toward Duryea.

The man passed without seeing Duryea. He had a rod in his hand. He was heading for the rear door.

Duryea said: "Drop it!"

The man stopped abruptly, started to whirl and fire but thought better of it. He dropped his gun upon the floor.

Duryea approached the man from behind. He recovered the weapon, which he tucked into his coat pocket.

"Maybe you can explain to the chief," Duryea said mildly, "how

your rod happened to go off as I was passing."

"It was an accident, Duryea," so help me!"

"Yeh?" Then: "Get goin'." As they marched through the front door, "New in town, ain't you?"

The man cursed. He didn't answer.

"It don't matter. I guess we got your mug down to headquarters."

They had. After the prisoner had been identified, Duryea and Chief of Detectives Egan were seated in the latter's office.

"And you say you picked this bird up at Muffy's apartment?"

"He took a pot shot at me, like I told you."

"His gun proves that. But what's Muffy trying to frame, Biff?"

"You got me, chief. It's kinda funny he sends outa town for a big-time gun like Arty Burks."

"Something's in the air. Muffy's trying some new kind of game."

"He throws around enough weight—he don't have to get outside help."

"Maybe one of the big city mob's trying to muscle in on Muffy's monopoly."

"Yeh. And hang out in Muffy's own apartment!"

But Egan countered: "Maybe Muffy's girl friend is crossing him."

"Not a lady killer like Muffy," Duryea objected. Then: "Patty still locked up?"

"No, Biff. I forgot to tell you. Weis came down and got her out."

"Muffy didn't frame her, chief. He was as surprised as anyone when I told him about it."

"He may have been acting. Clever, Muffy."

Duryea shook his head unbelievably.

"Hell," he said suddenly, "it's nearly five. And I ain't had a bite since ten o'clock!"

"Well, go out and feed yourself. No need to worry any more about Patty. Weis'll get her out from under, or I miss a guess!"

"Yeh," said Duryea, and helped himself to one of Egan's cigarettes before leaving.

AT NINE o'clock that night Duryea sat at a wall table in Muffy's night club. *The Midnight Swan*. He had been to see Patty at her rooming house and the landlady had informed him that Patty had a date with Muffy that night and that she had gone out to buy a new frock.

Duryea sat at the table and chewed a stalk of celery. He was sore. He had done a lot of walking, asked a lot of questions, and where was he? What did the gentlemanly stuff Egan advocated get you? Nothing. All crooks could understand was a sock in the mush! Egan or no Egan, he was through being a gentleman!

If he asked a guy a question and didn't get a straight answer—*wham!* It was the method that had made him famous. It was the method he was going to use tonight.

So, Muffy had won Patty over! The fur coat episode had been a plot after all. And Patty had fallen for it! But where did Muffy's present girl fit in? And where did the out of town gangsters fit in? Who was the guy with the scar on his cheek—if you believed Golio?

Duryea turned his head. Through the crowded front end of the dining floor he saw Muffy enter. Patty was at his side. She was smiling. She seemed to be enjoying herself, happy in Muffy's company.

Muffy came forward and directed the waiter to seat him on the side of the dance floor opposite Duryea. Duryea's table was not on the outside; rather, it was nearer the softly lighted side wall. Muffy did not see him. Muffy didn't mind detectives in his night club. Many of them took their flings in it.

Duryea chewed his celery meditatively as he watched Patty and Muffy order. He rose. He would stop Patty from getting herself mixed up in racketeer cheapness—just because

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Muffy had got her believing he was a noble knight errant. But Duryea sat down abruptly. He had glanced toward the front of the room.

Muffy's girl friend, wrapped in an ermine coat—the ermine coat, it suddenly came to Duryea—had entered. Around her were five men, gangsters. Out-of-town gangsters. Duryea had never before seen them. One, he noted, had a scar across his cheek.

Duryea glanced across at Muffy. His back was turned. A waiter passed his table. Duryea saw the side of the waiters' mouth move, saw Muffy turn suddenly and look at Baby—and the rival gangsters.

MUFFY looked a long time at Baby. It was plain he couldn't figure her play out. Anger was welling up in him, too. Duryea thought for a moment he was going to get up and cross the dance floor.

But after a tense interval, during which the out-of-town men regarded him silently, unsmilingly, he turned his attention again to Patty.

The orchestra boomed forth. Couples began to drift onto the dance floor.

To Duryea it was plain that the men Baby had brought in did not intend to let things ride along so easily. One of them got up, hitched his left shoulder where his rod was doubtless holstered and picked his way between the dancing couples. He was making for Muffy's table.

There was a smirk on his face as he drew up beside the table. He leaned over and spoke to Patty. She drew back. Duryea rose as he saw Muffy shove his chair back. The detective blundered through the dancers.

The stranger was saying: "I only asked the skirt to dance!"

"Yeh?" Muffy came back. "Well, she don't want to dance—with you!"

The dancers had stopped now and the orchestra seemed undecided whether to continue playing.

Duryea stopped beside the two gun-

men. He looked at the stranger and said: "Scram, you!"

The stranger regarded Duryea sarcastically.

"Yeh? Who the hell are you?"

Wham! Duryea let him have it flush in the mouth. When he hit the floor he was past making sarcastic cracks.

Duryea turned to Muffy.

"I'm takin' Patty outta this," he said.

Muffy said: "I can run my own show!"

"Yeh? Well, this is my show." He caught Patty's arm. "Come along!"

Muffy cried: "Look out, Duryea!" Patty screamed. Duryea ducked to one side.

A companion of the gunman Duryea had knocked out brought his revolver down on the detective's shoulder, barely missing his head. Duryea wheeled. With his free fist he swung with all his weight. He knocked the other onto the polished dance floor where he skidded and lay still.

The crowd had deserted the main floor and the last of them were pushing their way through the front door.

Duryea chewing slowly on a string of celery that remained in his mouth, stared across at Baby and her imported rodmen. They had their guns out, had them leveled at him. For a long minute he stood there and looked at them through the silence. Then he caught Patty's arm and started toward the front door with her.

The lights went out suddenly. Duryea dropped to the floor, pulled Patty down beside him. He began crawling at an angle toward the farther wall. The abrupt barking of rods broke the silence.

Under cover of the discharges, Duryea crawled toward the opposite wall. There was a window there. If he could get Patty through it—

There were yells now, yells from outside. Muffy's men were coming up. Due to his monopoly, Muffy had never kept his men near his night club for it gave the place an evil reputation.

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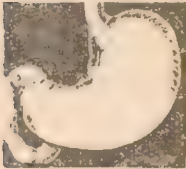
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DURYEA reached the window, of the French type, opened it and pushed Patty through. He turned back into the room with, "Wait outside," to the girl.

Somebody collided with him. One of Baby's gangsters who was also trying to make the window.

A scampering of feet in Duryea's direction. The man at Duryea's side snarled:

"Push through, you! We got to get out! What you standin' there for!"

Duryea hit him, sent him catapulting backward, heard him crash into a table and roll over.

Baby came up to him, caught his arm in the darkness, tried to tug him outside the window with her. She let out a choking cry.

"It's the dick! It's Duryea!"

Duryea clapped his hand over Baby's mouth. She tried to bite. He squeezed so hard she groaned from the pain. The man back of Baby tried to edge around her. Duryea heard him and shifted his position.

Duryea suddenly thrust the girl backward violently. She crashed into the imported gunman. They fell to the floor. Duryea threw himself to the right of them, guessing that the man had held his rod in his right hand. He guessed accurately. For as his groping fingers swept above the girl's body, they encountered a gun held in the hand of the man who was cursing, fighting to rise. His fingers closed over the gun, gave it a sudden twist.

The gunman howled his pain.

"My hand! You broke my hand!"

Baby was screaming now. She rose, made a dash for the window, her high heels clapping on the floor.

The lights came on as suddenly as they had gone off. Baby was clawing in Patty's stout embrace. Duryea went over, caught Baby's arm and said:

"Be good, Baby."

Muffy, his gun out, came up. His men were covering the imported gangsters, two of whom were gaining consciousness.

when answering advertisements

"I didn't figure on getting you in this jam, Duryea, when I signaled my guy at the door to douse the lights," he explained.

"Yeh," Duryea said, "that's all right."

"I get Baby's play now. She was sore at me for hanging around Patty so she framed Patty on the coat job. Crain was in on it, too."

"Yeh?"

"Sure. She tied in with Big Angelo over in the city, figured on getting her revenge by running me out and sending Patty up for a stretch."

"Yeh?"

"Sure. Some of my boys pulled the General Storage Fur job. I gave her the five furs myself. She wanted some. Then she makes a trade with Golio."

"How come them strangers was in your own apartment?"

"They wasn't there until after I'd left, Duryea. Soon's I saw her with Mulizza tonight I guessed her play. I already knew she'd framed Patty on the coat job because she was the one I'd given the General Storage furs to." He glanced around at the unconscious gunmen and continued, "I will say, Duryea, you wrecked 'em!"

Duryea thought: Yeh, Egan was wrong. It don't pay to be no gent. Duryea looked admiringly at his big ham of a fist. Wouldn't be a bad idea to call on Officer Crain right now.



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